

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



133 966

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

•

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

•



THE AUTHOR

" . . . meanwhile the pantomime was being carried out behind my back."

They Sent Me To Iceland

Jane Goodell



IVES WASHBURN, INC.

NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1943, BY IVES WASHBURN, INC.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

First Printing, November 1943

Second Printing, November 1943

Third Printing, December 1943

To

THE WOLVES OF ICELAND

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

CONTENTS

I

STARTS AND FITS

Page 3

2

DIGGING IN

Page 28

3

“HUT-NUTTY” OR “SAGA-GAGA”?

Page 55

4

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

Page 85

5

MEMBERS OF THE “FBI”

Page 107

6

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

Page 134

7

"GOING HOME THE FIRST"

Page 160

8

PROGRESS

Page 184

9

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Page 204

10

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Page 229

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE AUTHOR

Frontispiece

ICELANDIC SPRINGTIME

8

"AN-GEELS OF MER-CY ARE WE"

24

THE HOT STOVE LEAGUE

24

TEMPORARY CENTER

40

THE GENERAL

56

SWEET AND HOT AT "THE HOGPEN"

72

OUTPOST

88

"NAY-EE, NAY-EE!"

104

BROTHERHOOD OF THE "FBI"

120

REYKJAVIK

136

ALT I LAGI—"OKAY"

152

ARTS AND CRAFTS

168

COMPANY STREET, 3:30 P.M.

184

COOL AUDIENCE

200

GOING TO TOWN

216

"THE FIRST ECHELON"

232

REINFORCED A.R.C. PERSONNEL

232

•

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

•

I

STARTS AND FITS

"AIR-RAID red!" cries a voice outside the hut. In the distance the faint deep-throated growl of many sirens can be heard. There are sharp raps on the door; it is opened and the voice repeats: "Air-raid *red!*" The distant sirens are warming up in a slowly rising mournful wail. Many feet pound hurriedly past the hut. The mournful wail becomes a shrill angry scream that cuts through the thick stillness of the night and fills the hut with its stridor. Down near the sentry gate, a hand siren takes up the cry. The breathless eager voices of soldiers are heard as, loaded down with heavy guns, they report to their posts. "This is it!" There is a clank of metal against metal as they bob along. "Yeah . . . too late for practice alerte . . . real thing this time." Their voices vibrate with a strange emotion . . . almost with happiness. Everybody is awake and fumbling for gas masks and helmets. These must be handy, just in case. . . . Army trucks with lights out line up on the road, quietly, almost stealthily. Their drivers can be heard talking in excited undertones. The last one in line

clears his motor in a short blast and cuts the switch.

Now the sirens begin to die down, slowly, as if reluctant. Silence and darkness gather together to obliterate the last wisp of light from a cigarette and the last complaining note of the hand siren. Now the "waiting" begins—the wait that might last several minutes or might last several hours. Conversation is abandoned in favor of listening to a silence so pregnant with meaning that it is eloquent. The alert warning has raised nerves to a high pitch; for a few minutes we all listen, intently and expectant. Then, like the sirens, the stimulating effects give way to the thick silence.

It is a new world, without sound or light. One feels quite alone with only thoughts for companions. It seems incredible that a year ago I moved in an entirely different world. Was it a year? Or a century? In this reflection I relive the events leading up to this moment. Yes, it was a year ago that I was stationed at the hospital at Fort Belvoir, Va., as recreation worker. Yet, incongruous as it seems, that was the reason why I am in Iceland now. I hardly knew then that such a place existed! I knew it only as a small blob to the right of Greenland, a spot so insignificant that it looked as though the North Atlantic might submerge it completely at high tide. And now I am on this pin-point and in another world that seems to have no correlation with the one I left . . . was it centuries ago?

STARTS AND FITS

Four days before Pearl Harbor, it was, that a phone call from American Red Cross Headquarters in Washington had started everything. I heard a voice say, "Will you go to Iceland for the period of one year?" What? Iceland? Did I hear correctly? "Will you please repeat that?" The voice repeated into my unbelieving ears the same request. "Well, I er—a . . . I . . . I . . . don't know!" I still did not get it.

Later, eleven women and three men had gathered to listen to a brief talk by those who were sending us to Iceland. I am sure they all were in as much of a fog as I. Things had happened so fast for all of us that there was not much time to think clearly and thoroughly on any one point. Passports had to be rushed . . . physical examinations were rushed . . . we absorbed as many "shots" as were possible in such short time . . . not all our friends had been notified . . . uniforms had to be rushed . . . personal belongings hastily thrown into trunks, bags, boxes. There was no time to complete anything. Why were we going? That too was hastily explained, but somehow we caught the significance and its importance: we were to supply recreation for the Armed Forces in Iceland. The need was urgent—merely that was clear. How we were to undertake this job, no one knew. How could anyone know? We were the first American Red Cross group to be sent overseas in the capacity of recreation workers. Therefore there were no precedents, no detailed outline, no advance

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

knowledge of what would be required of us. Fine. We were to be pioneers. With this vague uncertainty before us, we sensed a challenge.

"You will wear civilian clothes until the day of embarkation." We were warned not to discuss our proposed trip in public places. We were warned to warn our friends and relatives not to tell others where we were going or approximately when we were leaving.

THUS, on December 12, 1941, we sailed out of New York Harbor in a troopship loaded to the gunnels with soldiers. For many hours after we had our last glimpse of the Statue of Liberty, confusion prevailed everywhere. Our two small adjoining cabins were cluttered with trunks, bags, boxes, for every one of us had all her luggage in these two cabins. There must be a mistake, we thought. There should be at least three cabins. There were four bunks in each . . . that would take care of eight women, but what about the remaining three? "Sorry, ladies, this is the best we could do for you. We just don't have any cabins left." Eleven women looked at one another in amazed horror, and then the humor of it set us all to laughing. "We're all going to know each other well when this trip is over."

Toward the middle of the afternoon a series of short rasping noises (like the quack of a duck) in-

STARTS AND FITS

licated boat drill. "No, no, lady, ya gotta tie your lifebelt tighter than that," a petty officer warns. "Now then, like this. Don't forget to cross your arms—so—and don't forget to cross your legs after you jump—that is, if you have to jump." I'll remember to keep my fingers crossed, too, I think. "You see, if you *don't* fold your arms this here cork lifebelt will jar up when you hit water, and *bingo*—you're a dead pigeon with a busted neck!" He pauses to let this sink in: "Now then, if you forget to cross your legs you'll live to regret it for a long, long time!" The thought does not occur to any of us that we might have to use these belts and might have to remember this warning. Somehow, that sort of thing can happen to others but not yourself.

Back in our cabins we made an effort to straighten up appearances and store our luggage away neatly. It was no use, for there just wasn't any space.

For three days the weather was clear and sunny. Another troopship had been riding close to us, now ahead, then off the stern. Farther away several cargo ships inched heavily along. Destroyers, we learned, were called "tin cans." "The boys on those jobs draw aviation and submarine pay," said a soldier who was leaning over the rail beside us. "When they're not way up in the air, they're way down under the water!" Even now, in fairly smooth water, they were bobbing up and down. "Looks like a storm coming

up," said another soldier. "Ah've nevah been to sea befoah . . . ain't goin' to like it much if hit gits rough!"

It was a storm, all right—the kind of storm that starts out in a small way. The ship began to rock gently but persistently. In an hour or so there was a definite increase in the degree of roll. Water sloshed about in the glasses, and one officer abruptly excused himself from the breakfast table. By the noon meal, the siderails were up and plates went skidding about. Quite a few people were missing. "Oh, no, feel fine, just not hungry, that's all."

Midafternoon blackout time had seemed such a thrilling gesture of secrecy and defiance. Now it threatened imminent suffocation for those of us who remained in our cabins. There was only one haven, one retreat—the wardroom where we had our meals. The air was better and there was room to sit and talk. "This ship has a capacity of eight hundred and I hear she's carrying eighteen hundred." The young Lieutenant is trying very hard not to think about seasickness. "Gee, we're so packed in the lounge that we have to sleep in shifts . . . they certainly pack 'em in, don't they?" We all nod in agreement. I recall that when I was last down in our cabins, three cots and fifty-odd pieces of luggage were giving everybody more trouble than usual. They had begun to roll about and no one had any rope to lash them down. The young Lieutenant swallows nervously. "Scuttle-



ICELANDIC SPRINGTIME

"One minute gloomy and brooding in wind and rain—colorful, sunny and sparkling the next . . ."

STARTS AND FITS

butt rumor has it that this ship would sink in three minutes if she were torpedoed. . . . It's a good thing we're having this rough weather . . . at least we are safe from subs. . . . Yes, it's a good . . . excuse me, please." He leaves hastily.

The colored waiters drew our attention with their repeated efforts to set the tables. We were in their way, so we got to our feet unsteadily. The rolling was much worse than when we came in. Better to lean against the wall with feet braced in readiness for the violent lurches. I began to feel a bit dizzy until I concentrated my entire attention on one waiter. Somehow, this helped to keep my mind off the fact that I was dizzy and quite susceptible to seasickness. Over and over he tried to place the silverware, dishes and cups in order. It was no use—each time a roll scattered everything. "We get into rougher seas every time we change our course . . . it seems," said an officer. "This zigzagging must have got us into a trough." No sooner had he said this than the ship suddenly lurched as though skidding downhill on her port side. We clung to the walls and managed to keep our footing while the ship lay on her side for what seemed an eternity.

A table and the chairs that had been roped about it broke loose and swept majestically across the clearing. The sideboard broke loose and sprayed its contents of silverware all over the floor. Now it seemed as though we were being elevated to great heights.

The ship righted herself with a mighty effort, clung to an upright position for one brief moment and then started sliding downhill on her starboard side. There was a deafening crash and more tables broke loose. Close behind the fleeing tables were four struggling figures. There was a tangled mass of arms and legs, and before we started rolling again I could make out Mary Dolliver and Nancy Duncan. We ran to help them to their feet but before we could make it there was that feeling of elevation again, and we were thrown back against the wall. Helplessly we watched the arms and legs fly past us. We reached out for them but were not quick enough. Fortunately, the course was altered and we no longer plunged about in the troughs. This was lucky for Mary, for a table leg had hit her in the eye, and the momentary pain and blindness might have caused more serious injury had she been pushed about any longer.

The hours that followed had seemed like days. The corridors were crowded with seasick men, the air was close and foul with staleness, engine oil, cooking odors and seasickness. And so it seemed that days must have gone by before we were able to get out on deck and breathe again. It was still a bit rough, but no one cared as long as he could breathe the fresh air. Man after man, too sick and weak to care whether he lived or died, was carried up from the bowels of the ship. Some were able to sit up, but many a one stretched out on the crowded deck, huddling close

STARTS AND FITS

to his neighbor for warmth. Poor kids, I thought, they must have been herded in droves. When one got sick, they all got sick. Probably most of them had never even been out of their home towns before. Probably many had never worn shoes before they got into the Army.

Some skinny little kid had a harmonica. He'd been sick as a dog. You could tell by the green hollow-eyed look. "C'mon, Luke, give us a tune." Now he whacks the harmonica hard against the palm of his hand, smiles as he puts it up to his lips. "Carry me back to Ol' Virginny," wheezes the little mouth organ. "You can take me back along with you, boy!" some one jokes feebly. "How about 'You Are My Sunshine'?" The men are beginning to come to life. Mary stands out where they can see her. "Let's all try to sing 'You Are My Sunshine' . . . what do you say?" At first her clear voice can be heard above everybody else's, but before we have sung the last verse the men have drowned her out. We sing the songs we know, and when we have finished we sing them all over again. After that everybody feels better. . . .

We felt even better when we saw land the following day. "Where are we?" the men asked. "Some say it's Halifax." "Well, Ah kin reely believe that," drawls a soft-spoken Southerner. "Ah shore felt lak Ah was headin' fer Halifax down in thet stinkin' hol' . . . man-oh-man!" We pushed through the long channel that leads into the main harbor. It was Halifax, all

right. "Are we going to be able to go ashore? How long are we staying over? Why are we here?" "The *Delta* broke down and we are going to wait until she has been repaired." Rumors began to circulate. By now only one rumor had been confirmed: that we were going to Iceland. Few of the men had known that. Now everybody knew it. (No one really believes a rumor, but there has to be something of interest to talk about.) "We are to pick up the biggest convoy that's ever gone out yet." Conflicting rumor: "Our ship has broken down, not the *Delta*."

We went ashore. No one regretted the break in the trip; after being cooped up for so many days, it felt pretty good to get back on solid ground and stretch the legs again. Everybody, including the troops, swarmed through the small shops, buying last-minute things they had forgotten before we left New York. I had forgotten to buy heavy stockings, and now it was bitter cold. 'No—oh, no, not those, thank you.' (The woman clerk was showing me a pair of long, black, thick stockings.) Anything but long black stockings. Yet they were all she had, and I was cold, and well . . . might as well. "We are having quite a cold spell," she said sociably, as she wrapped the stockings in a neat package. Our insignia caught her eye, and she smiled. "Do you know where you are going?" No sooner had she said this than she clapped her hand over her mouth. "Oh, I am terribly sorry. That was very thoughtless of me

STARTS AND FITS

to ask you that question, but it just slipped out. It's so hard to carry on a conversation these days, isn't it?" We left her greatly embarrassed despite our repeated assurances that no harm had been done.

We seemed to be the only women in uniform and people eyed us curiously, but all politely; and they carefully refrained from asking us questions.

The third day came and went, and still we lay in Halifax Harbor, going ashore each day. On the fourth day we were not permitted shore leave, and conjectures again produced rumors. "We are really crippled, turbine trouble, but we are going on ahead just the same, only we are going in a six-knot convoy instead. A helluva lot of fun that's going to be, too!" A slow convoy! God forbid! That would mean we would not reach Iceland until after the twenty-fifth—and we were due to arrive around the twenty-third, in time to give the boys a big Christmas. "Yes, and we'll be lucky if we can keep up with a six-knot convoy . . . this tub has had chronic engine trouble ever since she left drydock. She'd sink just on general principles . . . !" We almost believed this rumor; but others began to circulate as soon as we started moving out of the harbor. The ship was heading back to Norfolk for repairs; no, she was headed for New York; and while bets were being placed on Iceland, New York and Norfolk, a destroyer met us as we nosed out to sea and flashed: "This is your escort to Boston."

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

Boston or no Boston, we had a job ahead of us because it looked as though we might spend Christmas on board the ship. Well, we were not going to be able to do anything for the boys in Iceland, but there were plenty right with us who would need bucking up. Cigars, cigarettes, candy . . . pack together and wrap in Christmas paper. . . . We had managed to wrap six hundred presents, and then our ship began rolling ominously. Another storm. "I've wrapped seventy-five—if no one minds, I think I'll go to bed." Now there are ten women. An officer takes her place at the table: "Here, let me have the scissors and I can cut up the paper for you." Hands flutter back and forth over the table, measuring ribbon, sorting gifts, reaching for paper. The ship lurches abruptly and for an instant the fluttering ceases—ready to seize something solid if necessary. We are sea-wise now. The ship settles back into the same rhythm, and once more the hands fly about. "We are all good sailors by now, I guess. I really don't mind this as much as I did!" Ah, we are all too eager to agree; we are trying to convince ourselves by convincing others that we do not mind. From across the room a whiff of cigar smoke reaches the work table. "I think I'll go down to the cabin—are you coming, Margaret?" Eight women are left. I pause to eat an apple and then wish I hadn't. Maybe I want an orange instead. The ship begins to lurch again. Back and forth it quivers and pitches. No

STARTS AND FITS

more tonight. The cigar smoke and the rough seas have won another victory. . . .

All that night the ship rolled heavily, and because my bunk had no sideboards I was forced to cling to the wall with every roll that did not flatten me against it. Down below, sounds of a struggle went on as Camilla wrestled to keep her cot anchored in one spot. First she was tossed against Mary's bunk and then against Betty Clark's. It was a hard night for all. The following day we awoke to find that we were well in to Boston Harbor, and several hours later we docked alongside the Fish Pier. This was not even a climax. Where now, after taking twelve days to go from New York to Boston via Halifax? This was just the sort of situation Dame Rumor loves. When no one, from the skipper down to the stoker, knows what's going to happen next—when the Commanding Officer and even the buck private know still less—that is when the old Dame herself steps in and says, "At ease, children, and you will hear a thousand prophecies regarding your future."

Before she was able to get a head start, we transhipped immediately to a trim Navy transport, the *Heywood*. Our next move had become an established fact so quickly that we could hardly believe we had seen the last of the "Leanin' Lee."

For two or three days, cranes worked to unload the contents of the *Lee*. This cargo was then loaded into the *Heywood*. During the transfer from one ship

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

to the other we worked feverishly to complete preparations for a Christmas celebration for the troops aboard the *Heywood*. We wrapped a total of two thousand gifts, and when this was done we were given shore leave. On Christmas Eve we reported back to the ship and sang Christmas carols with the troops. On Christmas day we sang at the Christmas dinner as Margaret Singer and Camilla Greetham passed out the two thousand gifts one by one, and wished each man a "Merry Christmas!" at the same time. They were hoarse by the time they got through. As a matter of fact, everybody was suffering with sore throats and blistered fingers by the time we "hit the sack," but we slept better that night than we had since we left Washington.

CHRISTMAS, with all the work and worry it entailed, and the unpleasant trip aboard the first ship, was past. We looked forward with happier anticipation to our second attempt in this Navy transport. We learned that she was not only fast and efficient, but was equipped with guns, depth charges and sounding devices. Although we still had to have our fifty-odd pieces of baggage in our cabins, there were three cabins now; and that, of course, meant that we would be much more comfortable during this trip. Added to these comforts was an attractive combination lounge and wardroom, which, though small, was quite adequate for the complement of officers aboard

STARTS AND FITS

the ship. The Captain had cordially invited us to use the officers' lounge whenever we wished. Altogether, it looked as though we were going to have a better time aboard this ship, almost a pleasure cruise as compared to the last.

The day after Christmas rumors again circulated. "We are going to sail this afternoon." This rumor was refuted when we were given shore leave at noon, with the repeated warning: "You are not to make any phone calls, send telegrams or discuss your trip with anyone. You will be allowed to see friends and relatives in this city but under no conditions are you to mention the name 'Iceland' in public places." By now we had all learned to avoid the word "Iceland" and substitute with the code word at that time designated by the War Department. However, we could do nothing about our uniforms, for before we had embarked on our first ship we had sent our civilian outfits home—we were not permitted to bring civilian clothes to Iceland. In those days a woman in uniform was an object of great interest and curiosity, and many strangers stopped us in the streets and in stores. "Are you nurses—are you going overseas?" Others asked very pointedly, "Where are you going?" This was a marked contrast to our experiences in Halifax. Apparently Canadians were wiser in the matter of keeping a "zipped lip."

On the morning of December 26, the day started with much bustling aboard. We were put through a

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

rigid boat drill and at three o'clock that afternoon everybody was convinced that we would indeed lift anchor before the sun went down. By five o'clock, however, the entire ship was charged with a conflicting set of rumors, and at eight o'clock that night a general order was issued to the effect that officers, troops, Red Cross personnel, bags, baggage, and cargo were to be off the ship by 5:30 A.M. the next morning. I can't say that I blamed any of the officers who sat up all that night and drowned their sorrows in wine and song. No reasons had been given for this sudden and complete cancellation, but many of us chose to believe the rumor that the ship was badly needed in the Pacific.

By two o'clock we were all packed, and after two and a half hours' sleep we disembarked and boarded the troop train waiting at the docks. By three o'clock that afternoon the rumor that we were going to Fort Slocum was confirmed as we settled ourselves in the officers' club at that little island post. Wisely, though, we refrained from getting too settled or comfortable, and lived out of our handbags so that we could be ready to leave at a moment's notice. For many of us, whose homes were within a fifty-mile radius of New York, it was maddening not to be able to leave the island or even make a phone call. For four days we endured this moment-to-moment existence—and then we were informed by our patient chief, Mr. Lake Russell, that we were to return to Washington!

STARTS AND FITS

In other words, now we would have to wait until February before starting out all over again.

By this time Iceland seemed a myth, a sort of Shangri-la which we would spend the rest of our lives striving to reach. I began having nightmares, which seemed to run into the waking hours and had me wondering if the whole assignment was but a fantastic dream. It seemed incredible that not a month ago I had been leading a normal sort of life, with regular hours for work and play, making plans for both and being able to count on them. This retrospection caused me to consider my erstwhile civilian life a secure but rather narrow existence. To head back to Washington after all the trouble, secrecy and headaches that Headquarters had suffered in getting us started twenty-one days ago now seemed funny. We could have cried bitterly and not been blamed in the least, but laughing about it did more to relieve the tension.

We were met in Union Station. Our passports were taken up, and we were told to make ourselves scarce, quiet and available until further notice, which it was thought would be in February. Until then we were free to go where we wished.

COUNTING too heavily on leaving in February, I was somewhat dismayed when a telephone call on the tenth of January ordered me to report for embarkation not later than six o'clock on the twelfth. Fortu-

nately we had definite orders to board the third transport by 7:30 P.M. on the fourteenth, and thus I was allowed some time in New York City with the understanding that I present myself at the docks not later than that hour. The rest of our group was to take the ferry.

I made the most of my leave and arrived at the dock gates out of breath but on time. It was lucky for me that we had passed through these same gates before, for I did not have a passport or any identification papers; but I was remembered—or rather, my uniform was—and they allowed me to pass through. I also knew that Pier Two was the approximate location of the ship. At the pier, I was challenged by an M.P., who referred me to the Provost Marshal, whose office was a good distance away. But the P.M. was not to be found. I back-tracked to Pier Two, to be met this time by an obliging M.P. officer who thought he knew the ship I was to board and willingly escorted me thither. As I was about to mount the gangplank (down which one cannot return to the docks, once aboard the ship) we learned that this was a British vessel bound for England. Undaunted, we started down the long cold pier to another ship said to be carrying Red Cross personnel. It turned out to be a cargo vessel carrying Red Cross equipment but no passengers. By now it was 8:30 and I was tired, cold and fearful that somehow I had missed the boat. I began to feel foolish, running

STARTS AND FITS

about like a chicken trying to get back into the hen-yard.

At the point where all the dockhands and soldiers were becoming concerned with my predicament, I bumped into Mr. Russell. He was pacing back and forth in front of the one gangplank that I had not started to climb. There was an anxious, troubled look on his face, and I felt sure I was in for a sharp reprimand. But I flattered myself to think that he was worried about me: he was worried about the whole group, which had not yet arrived. I was told to go aboard, and the Commanding Officer escorted me to the cabins reserved for us. My heart sank when I saw them, for they had been stripped bare; not a bunk remained! Major —— explained to me that the normal two bunks in each were to be replaced by six; that the job should be completed by midnight. In the meantime, his cabin was at our disposal.

At 9:30 the rest of the group arrived—tired, wet, cold and hungry. We crowded into the small cabin and awaited further developments. By eleven o'clock the troops were all aboard, and the hammering on the deck outside the window was replaced by the sound of scuffling feet as the soldiers prepared to turn in. Over two hundred bunks had just been installed on the decks, with a plywood enclosure for protection against the elements. These troops were new to us, but by the next morning we were thoroughly acquainted with their innermost thoughts.

At midnight we gave up all hope of getting into our cabins. We were preparing to sleep where we could, mainly on the floor, when the lights went out all over the ship (for what reason we never did determine) and stayed out the rest of the night. The brief silences that allowed us to doze were punctuated by grunts and curses as men, bent on secret missions, bumped into hard unyielding objects or stumbled over one another. We welcomed the new day with feeble efforts to look as though we had not slept in our clothes.

However, an excellent breakfast put us back on our feet and renewed our interest in our new surroundings. We learned that we were on a Puerto Rican liner which had just been converted into a troop transport. A few weeks before, she was preparing to sail with a complete complement of passengers when the trip was suddenly cancelled. She was well stocked with the food supplies intended for her civilian passengers—hence our delicious breakfast and the promise of good food for the entire trip.

Her hasty conversion, however, spelled greater discomfort in the long run. We were reduced again to two cabins, smaller than ever. By ten o'clock they were ready, and we charged upon them with buckets of water, mops and brooms. The windows were smeared with blackout paint, and there were no ventilating devices. The large dining saloon had been taken over for the troops, leaving a small sliver

STARTS AND FITS

in which the officers would eat—five shifts to a meal. True to form, the transport was packed way beyond her normal capacity, and that did not bode well either.

At 11:30 A.M. we cast off with whistles going full blast and harbor tugs snorting around us like a pack of Scotties around a good-natured mastiff. We had our fingers crossed as two tugs came to blows amidships, first pounding us, then each other, amid hoarse tootlings, asthmatic puffings and the irate curses of their skippers. A fine thing, to be sunk in New York Harbor by two small tugs when we were prepared for deep-water trouble! A third tug, coming to the rescue, sent the other two flying about their business, and soon we were nosed into our own power and on our way to join our convoy.

Although cold, the day was sunny. We went topside for a better view of our convoy, and were rewarded with a most impressive sight. Unlimited vision permitted us to count between eighty and one hundred ships. I recognized a carrier, a battleship and a cruiser; and there were many destroyers. The British transport that I had almost boarded was also with us—a tremendous three-stacker which excited our imagination until we learned that she was not the *Queen Mary*.

Four blimps floated lazily overhead for two days, and then the carrier took over the job of spotting subs.

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

One after the other, she tossed a dozen or so planes into the air, and they in turn would circle round our convoy in search of trouble. Sometimes, as though something beckoned on the horizon, they would dart off and be lost to sight. We would count them as they returned, just to make sure that all was well and that nothing had happened to them. If mental telepathy could be relied upon, each pilot coming in for a landing could have relaxed completely and let us bring the ship in for him. One day when it was particularly rough we had a most exhausting experience getting one chap in. The carrier was a good distance away, which added to our difficulty in observing just why he was not able to land. He made seven tries before finally, after much effort and straining on our part, he brought her down on the eighth attempt. It left me feeling as though I had been pulled through a wringer.

On the evening of the second day, we had our first taste of depth-bomb reverberations at close range. We had just returned from boat drill and had crawled into our bunks when a dull explosion jarred our ship. How I ever got out of my top bunk and grabbed a lifebelt without realizing what I was doing is beyond me. But there I stood, foolishly saying over and over: "This is it, gals, this is it!" Furthermore, I honestly do not know what was meant by "this is it," unless my subconscious mind had learned the importance of sudden action in the event that



"AN-GELS OF MER-CY ARE WE"



THE HOT STOVE LEAGUE

STARTS AND FITS

we were torpedoed. The rest followed suit and we were just getting into lifebelts when a voice outside our door informed us that tin cans were being dropped by an accompanying destroyer, and that all was well. I crawled back into my ceiling-zero bunk feeling like a silly alarmist.

That night a storm began to make things miserable for us, but the ones who really suffered were the boys sleeping on the enclosed deck. A wave of generous proportions swept away the plywood bulkhead and gave them such a sudden drenching that they were as scared as they were wet. The next morning we opened our cabin door to find that we had to step over sleeping men all the way to breakfast. For the rest of the trip they slept thus, and most of them fought for the space in front of our door. We thought this was very flattering until we learned why: those of us who were too indisposed to go to mess turned away most of the food that was brought to our cabin; and Ethel Rea, with a Yankee's dislike for waste, salvaged the choicest morsels and sneaked them out the door to the men on the other side.

Not long after this we awoke one morning to find that the carrier and the greater part of our convoy were no longer with us. We had split off from them.

As we went farther north, the days grew shorter and blackout hours longer; and I began to value air as I would my life. We were not allowed on deck during blackout. Water also was at a premium. The

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

few drops that trickled from the faucet twice a day barely served to keep our teeth clean, and for four days our drinking water was so badly tainted that even a sip of it not only tasted like a dose of salts but also had the same deadly effect. We should have been completely dehydrated by this four-day drought, yet we continued to perspire freely and, when entertaining the men in the hold, copiously.

However, the physical discomforts did not dampen our spirits even when we were obliged to take our immunization shots during a brisk storm. There was but one incident which struck a saddening note in our trip: a soldier died on the sixth day out, and we went aft to attend the funeral services. The memory of his canvas-bound body tumbling in our wake depressed me for days after.

ON THE tenth day, following a severe storm, an undercurrent of excitement ran through the whole ship. It was rumored that we were about to arrive in Reykjavik Harbor. All that day anxious eyes scanned the horizon for the first glimpse of land, but it was not until early the next morning that we saw land-lights twinkling in the distance. By ten o'clock we were well into the harbor and at 10:25 we dropped anchor, with Reykjavik and an entirely new world before us.

It was a cold, bitter day, but the sun, which popped out of the horizon and set three hours later in almost

STARTS AND FITS

the same spot, was the first sunshine Iceland had had for weeks. This seemed a good omen, somehow, and certainly it gave us a most favorable first impression. Quite contrary to our expectation, my imagined land, dark, flat, of mud and rock, dissolved into snow-capped mountains gleaming in the clear atmosphere. White fleecy clouds hung low all about the horizon—a paradise for photographers and meteorologists. I could not understand why the sky was so blue when the sea beneath it was such a heavenly clear green.

2

DIGGING IN

MY ENTRY into this new world was not very graceful, for I all but broke an officer's back in negotiating the distance between our ship and the Navy lighter that was to take us ashore. One by one my companions had grasped his helping hand and made it in three precarious steps. The little craft had been rolling gently, but when my turn came it began to rise and fall on the waves in the wake of a passing boat. I stepped forward—only to find my foot poised in mid-air, as the lighter suddenly dropped a good three feet. Ready hands snatched me back. Shouts of encouragement came from the soldiers who were hanging over the rails: "Hold everything, now, take it easy there!" Up bobbed the gunnels of the lighter: "There's your chance, quick, quick, quick!" I started forward again, but I wasn't quick enough and in mock dismay the soldiers groaned in unison: "Awwww, she didn't make it . . . try, try again!"

By now they were all hanging way out over the rail, watching with avid interest. If anyone was going to fall in, they did not want to miss the fun.

DIGGING IN

"Don't worry, I'm here," said the officer, and before I could tell him that I was going to make it in one leap, I saw my chance and took it. I had intended to use him merely as a vaulting pole—but upon seeing me flying through the air, he thought I had lost my balance. He made a valiant attempt to catch me bodily. It was an awkward moment for both of us; painful for him and embarrassing to me, for my skirt and jacket had been jerked up around my neck.

For a fleeting moment we lay in a crumpled heap on the deck and there was a dead silence, while everybody wondered if we had not both been killed by the impact. When we got to our feet, however, and it was apparent that we had suffered no serious injuries, a wild cheer broke out among the troops. "Hurray! They made it! Major, you deserve the D.S.O. for that! Boy-oh-boy!" As we looked at each other in confused embarrassment, the episode was quickly forgotten, for by now we had cast off and everybody was waving. "We'll see you ashore—see you again soon."

The city of Reykjavik loomed larger and larger before our eyes as our lighter approached the docks. Still it did not seem possible that at last we had arrived at our destination. As we started to warp in to a quay, a Marine waved us off. We backed out and someone cracked: "Here we go again . . . another month before we finally land!" No one would have been surprised if we had been ordered back to

the transport for a prolonged period. We headed for another dock, where for a few minutes it was touch-and-go before we finally got the signal to land. We could hardly believe it when we came up against the pier with a resounding bump. Someone would come out on the run, with a "No, no, you can't land here!" Instead, a sailor said: "Okay, here's where you get off at!" We wasted no time in doing so.

Boy! Didn't it feel good to get our feet on solid ground! Lurching drunkenly, for we were a little dizzy until we got our "land legs" again, we staggered up the pier to the ambulances that were to take us to our temporary quarters—a near-by hospital, we were told. Soldiers and marines in parkas and fur caps stood watching us with friendly interest. Dizzy and disheveled, in our bundled condition (it was bitter cold) we could not have been a very prepossessing sight, but they welcomed us with warm smiles, remembering, perhaps, the discomforts they had endured during their own trip to Iceland.

By the time we reached the ambulances we were surrounded with men and officers who took our bags and shook hands with us and all talked at once. Adding to this confusion were rosy-cheeked natives who, dressed in their Sunday best, had to push their way through our crowd as we blocked up the narrow waterfront street. Soldiers who were unloading a boat cried out to us and there were distractions all

DIGGING IN

about. A tall sergeant ran up as we were stepping into the ambulances: "Hold it, please, just line up for a moment while we take your picture." We did so, thinking that they were "stills." For a second we "smiled at the birdie," then relaxed. I continued to chew the gum that had been warding off seasickness. A hidden movie camera caught us off guard and recorded this rather unbecoming moment of relaxation with relentless exactitude. The whole thing, I learned months later, had been spoiled by a prolonged vision of vigorous gum-chewing topped by an expression better suited to a gun-moll than the Angel of Mercy I was supposed to be.

Convoyed by jeeps and recon cars we sped through the town at such a rate that we were tossed about like dried peas in a pod with every skidding turn. We could see very little through the rear and only windows of the ambulance, but what we saw had us oh-ing and ah-ing and chattering like magpies. We hushed when we came to an abrupt stop and the sentry stuck his head in. His serious young face became wreathed in smiles when we all said in unison: "Hi there! How are you?" He was somewhat taken aback by this non-military greeting, but he said, "Fine—you may pass," gave us a friendly salute and shut the door again. Shortly after we passed through the gates we saw long corrugated huts; they were much bigger than we had imagined they would be, but these of course served as hospital wards.

Again we came to a stop and the doors were opened by the driver, who helped us out and nodded in the direction of a large square-shaped building which stood out among the surrounding huts like a packing-box among tin cans. We crowded into the small foyer and seated ourselves on benches against the wall. We sensed a long wait. A whisper ran around that we were waiting for the General. Red-robed patients passed through on their way to or from their ward huts. We smiled and said "Hello," and in their astonishment they could only nod their heads. On some pretext or other they soon found reason to return through the foyer, though, and by this time they had found their voices. I think they would have welcomed the opportunity to talk with us, but just as we were encouraging them the General and his staff arrived, and the red robes vanished into thin air.

Tall, white-haired and scholarly appearing, the General gave us a pleasant welcome and escorted us down "Nurses' Row." We halted in front of two new Quonset huts. We were all impressed by their cozy snug interior, for we had thought of huts as being rather bleak and drafty. Perhaps the big pot-bellied stove imparted more than warmth. It snapped and crackled and gave off such cheery, friendly noises that we hardly noticed the bareness with which the huts were furnished. There were eight hospital beds neatly made. That was all. The nurses who had come in to make sure that we were comfortable suggested

DIGGING IN

that we make our own furniture out of packing boxes. Of course, they explained, packing boxes were hard to get, even sticks were at a premium; therefore it would pay us to hang on to the boxes our equipment came in. We learned that there was no paint on the island, but that a blowtorch applied to the wood just so gave this home-made furniture a smoky antique look.

I asked the nurses why there were screens in the windows and why, above all things, the frames were attached to the door as one unit. "Quonset, or American huts, are prefabricated for tropic as well as arctic regions," they told us. "These are the first American huts on the post; we live in the old British Nissen." This was said rather wistfully. We learned that these new huts were slightly larger, approximately thirty-two feet by fifteen. Furthermore, their huts had, for many months, been withstanding the ravages of the elements and were not without leaks and drafts as a consequence. They told us of their arrival four months back. It had been made in driving rains and high winds that did not cease for days and days. Their huts, in a sad state of disrepair, leaked like sieves. To reach them they were obliged to wade knee-deep through mud and large pools of water.

Down the row a little bath hut with a sign on its door saying "Nurses Only" gave us further reason to feel that our arrival had been made on velvet. The four showers, three closets and two handbasins

looked pretty inadequate to us until we were told that not long ago there had been but one of each—and that made it pretty hard for seventy nurses. To add to the inconvenience, all the fittings were British.

Having a go at British plumbing is somewhat like sparring. The first tug is like a jab into thin air . . . there is no response. The second tug simply stirs up a gurgle of defiance overhead, followed by the sound of water as it trickles thinly and derisively through distant pipes. By now you realize that you are up against a tough proposition. There have been others before you who are not master mechanics, and if they can do it then *you* can! Enraged, you jerk three or four times and bring the chain down upon your head with a sharp rap. There is a hollow chortle from the depths of this inanimate object. You sit down to catch your breath and consider the situation from all sides. This, you decide, requires a steady hand and a cool head. By the time the rather obscene laughter has died away, you have devised a method whereby you can't lose; the process of elimination will no doubt yield the desired results if you persevere. With grim determination you apply yourself to the job that may take hours to accomplish. By turns you are gentle, then stern. You parry and foil with increasing ease and grace. You begin to fancy yourself a martyr to an enigmatic cause and are relishing the picture, when lol there is a mighty roar, and

DIGGING IN

you look up in time to avoid the cascade of water that threatens to inundate you. You have won!

Should you desire a shower you must be adroit of wrist and nimble of foot, for the hot water has an unpleasant habit of going cold quite abruptly, leaving you to the mercy of freezing glacial water. Equally treacherous and more painful are the occasions when boiling hot water instead of cold shoots out at you in great clouds of scalding steam. If others are drawing water at the same time, water pressure is cut down. You are usually lathered from head to foot at this most unpropitious moment, and thus you remain in soapy splendor for five, ten or fifteen minutes until the mass attack on the water supply has subsided. This little hut is a clearing house in more ways than one. Here gossip, scandal and rumors are exchanged. It serves as a refuge for those who may wish to read or write without disturbing their hut-mates. It is also the only place where one can just sit and think.

NO SOONER had we arrived at the hospital, it seemed, than night—black and implacable—descended upon us without so much as a warning twilight. At five o'clock we trudged across the snow to the large mess hut reserved for the nurses. Our first meal in Iceland was as educational as it was novel. Wide planks on sawhorse supports served as tables, with sheets for tablecloths. I learned that one rarely received a

full complement of eating utensils. If you got a fork, you didn't get a spoon; if you got a glass, you didn't get a cup. It paid well, I noted, to be on time for meals. In doing so one could collect this equipment without the necessity of waiting until someone else was through with it. This meant, of course, that the stragglers had nothing to work with by the time they arrived, but it was considered fair play.

A spoon served many purposes. It measured out the vitamin C (bottles were on every table), it measured out sugar and stirred the coffee; and if a fork was missing, the entire meal from soup to dessert was eaten with the humble spoon. The coffee cup was equally essential and was used for water, coffee and dessert.

Our first meal consisted of soup, Spam, dehydrated potatoes, carrots and pie. All subsequent meals seemed to be patterned after the first, with perhaps cake instead of pie, but it was always Spam and dehydrated vegetables. This remained the chief diet until a convoy arrived from the States. The respite was brief, however, and a week or so later our menu was again repetitious and unvarying.

There is no doubt that our diet, although unpalatable at times, was well balanced in the matter of vitamins, and we thrived on it; when you are hungry you will eat anything. It was not until several months later, when a cooking school was started for the sol-

DIGGING IN

diers, that we learned that dehydrated food, if properly handled, can be really delicious.

During that first supper we alternately asked and answered questions. The nurses were as hungry for word from home as we were curious about our new location. What were the latest song hits in the States? Were the shops in Reykjavik well stocked? What were the latest fashions for women at home? What were the natives like? Later, Mary and I accepted their invitation to go to the Officers' Club. Although we were with them not more than an hour, we received in that time a very clear picture of what these nurses had gone through. They did not complain or whine. They simply stated that they had volunteered for Foreign Service knowing well that certain hardships were inevitable. They were willing to take the material discomforts of the first month or two. That was to be expected. They did not mind the fact that they had had to step lively to prepare the hospital for the patients, who started coming in shortly after they landed. That was a part of the job, too. Sure, everybody was blue and homesick during the first few rainy weeks, but they had been working so hard to get things settled that they had little time to sit down and have a good cry. Besides, they said, they were so tired that they could and did sleep when off duty. "We've only been here four months . . . it seems like years." No more was said.

Before that night was over, everyone in our group had caught the essence which lay behind personal problems that might well be ours as time went by. As we prepared to go to bed we discussed it briefly. "Do you suppose," I asked as I primly locked the door, "that we'll be fighting boredom three or four months from now?" At that point I would have appreciated assurance to the contrary. It was not a pleasing thought with which to end our first day on the island. "I think that depends on lots of things," replied Mary. "Besides, I think that we are all going to be too busy to worry about it."

Golly, didn't it feel good to *spill* into bed for a change! No more crawling up, from one bed to the other. Now I could sit bolt upright and not whack my head. No more suffocating nights to be spent in slyly opening cabin windows. No more nights broken by the noise of heavy boots. I sighed happily. We were here, safe and sound, and no more worrying about that. . . . I must have gone to sleep while appreciating the firmness with which my bed was anchored to one spot, for it seemed an eternity before I was aware that a loud banging on the door was not a part of my dream.

Bang, bang, bang! I was awake by now and so were the others. "What—who is it?" we whispered hoarsely to each other. Ethel took the first step: "Yes? Who is it?" A muffled voice answered: "Striker, ma'am, this is the striker." Striker indeed! What is a

DIGGING IN

striker doing in an Army camp at this hour of the night—and what on earth have we got to do with him? “Land alive, who’d he say he was?” asked Mary. “He says he’s a striker,” I relayed to the rest. “Imagine being awakened in the middle of the night by some poor idiot who wants to tell you he’s on a strike!”

I tried to sound bravely indignant, outraged even, to impress it upon our intruder that we were not interested in his occupation, profession or hobby. “But ma’am,” the muffled voice became pleading, “I’m the striker on fire duty—I’ve got to tend your fire!” “Oh, good heavens, it’s only the *stoker*, Jane. Go ahead and let him in,” commanded Ethel. He was forgiving. “Guess you didn’t know it, but we have to tend your fires all night long.” No, we certainly did not know that these stoves required such close attention. Ethel had “put it to bed”; and after she had stoked it, poured in the coal and set the dampers with an experienced hand, none of us had given it further thought.

Before our striker left us to sleep the rest of the night in unbroken peace, we learned that his name was Joe and that he came from Peoria. He elaborated, and in great detail he told us that he was Polish; that he had a girl back home whom he was going to marry; that his mother was ailing, his father a drunkard—that he could not understand the native girls—on and on in his broken English. He gave us his life his-

tory, the latest rumors, and a glimpse into the heart and mind of the enlisted man with whom we were to work. Actually he tended the fire three times a night; but during the nights that followed I could swear that our stove received attention every hour on the hour—and every time I was awakened by a flashlight playing on my face. All the strikers on duty must have known our faces quite well before the first week was over.

Joe's delight in being able to talk to us was such that we did not have the heart to discourage him. For a week or so everything went along all right with our heating plant, and then Joe began to slip up. Little things, like turning up the damper and forgetting, or turning down and forgetting, had us alternating freezing and roasting. Ethel finally decided that it was best to forego Joe's services completely. She took over his duties, whereupon our slumbers were uninterrupted save for the nocturnal activities of mice.

Icelandic mice are bold little creatures. They were given to clambering up the food shelves by way of our beds. For some of us this was a ghastly experience, naturally, but mice were preferred to the rats we had seen scurrying about the hospital post. We tried to make our huts unpleasant for the mice; food was put away in tins and traps were set, but they were much too smart to be caught. Our little "family" soon grew into a community whose members



TEMPORARY CENTER

"The first comfortable chairs they had sat in for many months."

DIGGING IN

worked on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis. Day or night they could be heard nibbling, scampering about among papers, boxes and books, and softly squeaking to each other. In time we became hardened to their presence, and I even derived quite a bit of pleasure from watching a mouse climb upon the shelves at the foot of my bed. Night after night the same mouse called for a bit of chocolate I had left on the top shelf for him. He waxed fat, sleek and bold, but he was not so wise as his more timid fellows; on one of his ventures, he almost came to an untimely end. Someone had failed to replace the top to a jar of peanut butter, and my fine furry friend apparently could not resist sampling a bit. In he tumbled. He may have been a prisoner for two or three days; no one could remember when the peanut butter was last used when I discovered him thus, completely submerged save for a tiny bit of his nose. I tipped the jar and helped him out; he was the slickest, slipperiest and most sheepish-looking mouse I have ever seen. In view of what he had gone through and had managed to survive, we decided that he deserved to live. Besides, no one had the heart to kill him anyway.

Perhaps the most startling disturbance during the night was caused by an otherwise quiet and unruffled person; Helen Lee Stevenson had frequent and extremely audible nightmares, during which she pleaded to be let out. This performance was

varied from time to time with desperate entreaties to be let in, but the introduction was always the same—a loud, piercing, heart-rending scream.

Alertes throughout the night were likewise to be expected. We were warned by a knocking on the door: "Air-raid yellow!" This meant "prepare." To prepare was to get out of bed, dress, and with gas mask and helmet handy wait for "red," which meant action, or "all clear." A wait might last fifteen minutes, or perhaps—as we soon discovered—till the evening of the following day.

During our first two weeks we had a lively time of it with a mysterious prowler who was first observed by the sentry and was shot at when he refused to halt. He escaped, returned a few nights later, and was seen lurking behind the nurses' huts. By this time everybody was on the qui vive. Guards were posted along Nurses' Row and shots rang out now and then for several nights. One took great care to identify one's self when traveling about the hospital grounds after dark. The excitement died a natural death when rumors began to fix the fate of our mysterious visitor. It was said that he was an escaped lunatic native who had finally been apprehended. Then he was a Nazi spy who was finally shot and killed by one of the guards. Of course, no one in our own group ever really knew the true story; but it had caused so much excitement among us

DIGGING IN

that we were sorry we could not tell about it in our letters home.

THERE were many such little incidents that would have supplied us with plenty of material for our correspondence, but stern censorship said no. On the day following our arrival, before we had found an opportunity to write letters telling of our safe landing, we were given a little talk by the General and the Colonel of G-2 (Army Intelligence). Such harmless-seeming subjects as weather, terrain and climate were taboo. The importance of maintaining strict censorship was impressed upon us especially, since we were required to censor our own letters. Being put on our honor, as it were, made us all the more conscientious in adhering to the rules, and consequently we had little or nothing about which we could safely write.

Never shall I forget a most agonizing experience I endured when, in a moment of haste and thoughtlessness, I broke a strict censorship regulation. All letters were to be mailed through the Army Post Office only; but one very busy day, while working at the Recreation Center, I was approached by a young soldier who was vaguely familiar. "Miss Jane, if you want any letters to go home in a hurry, they will if you'll give them to me right now." Maybe this soldier was in the Air Corps, knew of a plane about

to leave with mail, and could make the proper official mailing arrangements. So I penned a hasty note to the effect that I was well but busy, and handed it to my volunteer postman with no guilty qualms or further compunctions. I straightway forgot the episode until a day or so later, when Betty Clark shattered my peace of mind with "I hear they caught lots of sailors with uncensored letters yesterday." That meant nothing to me. "Poor fellows," continued Betty, "they will be punished severely—but wait until they get the people who wrote the letters and evaded censorship!"

Like an arrow the words "evaded censorship" pierced my consciousness. Questions began to torment me; had that soldier given my letter to a sailor? Who *was* the soldier anyway? What would happen to me? I was really scared. I tried to find the soldier, but could not. For days I worried and stewed and mentally kicked myself for having been so careless. It was not that I had said anything of importance in the letter, I argued with myself, but my conscience told me that it was the principle; I had broken a regulation. I think that in the end I suffered more with myself than if I had been called upon the mat and had the book thrown at me.

We later enjoyed, for a very brief period, a respite from our correspondence problems; we were allowed to tell what the country looked like, and even where we were. It was wonderful while it lasted but, as I

DIGGING IN

have said, it did not last long. It came to an abrupt end with a change of our APO number. We were instructed to notify our friends and relatives of this change with a cryptic veiled statement: "My APO number so-and-so has been changed to APO such-and-such." Beyond that nothing more was to be discussed—we could no longer mention that we were in Iceland. Of course, the response to this change of address was charged with queries. Where had we moved? When? Were we still in Iceland? We were not allowed to answer these questions either, and for many weeks letters from home were pleading and then irate. Thereafter correspondence was even more impossible.

I don't believe that any of us thought censorship unreasonable, for the Colonel had explained to us that it was not so much that the people at home should not know certain things; it was simply that *if* a mailboat were captured its cargo of letters would be of great informative value to the enemy, particularly if there were details about the weather. Being masters at deduction, they could thereby gain certain meteorological facts that might be of great assistance to them. Said our General, "An attack is always imminent—it is a possibility for which we shall always be prepared and on the alert. We do not intend to have a second Pearl Harbor in Iceland!" Indeed, all we had to do was look at the large-scale military map that hung upon the wall to see how

very close we were to Nazi-occupied Norway, not more than 450 miles away.

We were also instructed as to how we were expected to conduct ourselves while with the Military. At no time were we to be "out of uniform" (civilian clothes were never to be worn) and we were required to abide by the same rules that applied to the nurses. We were to attend the periodic reading of the Articles of War, show our passes at the sentry gate of every camp we entered, and not be inquisitive about troop movements. We were finger-printed, photographed and properly filed. "Now you'd better behave yourselves," said the G-2 Colonel waggishly, "for we'll know every move you make. We know everything that has happened to you since you left the States, and I can prove it to you." Somebody giggled hysterically. "You were all pretty seasick," he grinned, and we all agreed with him in a united groan. "Furthermore, you came through a nest of twelve submarines on your eighth day out."

We gasped. Twelve submarines? We could hardly believe it. We knew that two had been sighted or pinged, *but twelve!* How . . . where . . . why hadn't we been attacked . . . and sunk? He waited while we looked at one another with the same thought in mind—what *might* have happened. The Colonel continued: "Oh, of course you didn't know what was going on. But we did, because it is our business to

DIGGING IN

know these things and a lot more besides. So be very careful in what you write, say or do."

After this little talk from the Colonel and the General we were invited to "inspect" headquarters camp, the rows upon rows of neat huts housing the brains and power lines that motivated this big command. The General then invited us to include his quarters in our inspection. He lived in such simple soldierly surroundings, furnished in such neat good taste, that we all secretly shuddered at the thought of his ever inspecting our messy huts.

No matter how we arranged the furniture, foot lockers, or trunks, our huts always looked like the morning after a terrific binge. We put curtains in our windows and curtains about the crude framework that served as a community closet. I went so far as to put curtains about my bed to hide the collection stored beneath it. But it was of no avail. To the day we moved, we lived amid clutter, cultch and fine lava dust.

Once a week two native women came in to rid our hut of this dust with pails of soapy water and big mops. At first they were inclined to great shyness when we tried to talk to them. We learned in time that they were shy because they could not understand English very well. In fact, they understood nothing. This revelation gave us a surprise, for we had understood that all Icelanders study English, which is com-

pulsory in all their high schools. Apparently they had forgotten whatever they had learned, and Cam Greetham felt it was high time that someone refreshed their memory. She undertook this job. "When I say, 'How are you?'" she instructed them, "you should say, 'I'm cooking with gas, kid!'"

"Nay, nay, skillikki!" The plump rosy-cheeked woman giggled and swung back and forth on the mop.

You could see that she loved fun and laughter but had a distrust of foreigners. She was torn between the two, so she made a compromise by saying "Skillikki" ("Jeg skilekki": No understand) and laughing. Her companion, stern and almost forbidding at first, soon broke down and confessed that she knew a little English—the days of the week, and counting to ten. Somehow she suggested a person of deep emotion inhibited and denied an outlet—therefore we called her "Frustrated Garbo."

"America is wonderful," commented Cam, to get them started.

"Yow? Island iss-iss—?"

"Wonderful, too?" Cam urged.

"Yow, Island iss wan-der-fool too, yow," replied Skillikki.

"I am an Indian, ya-hooooo-eee . . . the original American. Who-eeee, who—eee!" Cam's victims backed away as she bugged her eyes, bared her teeth and howled.

DIGGING IN

"Oh, Cam, you're awful to scare them like that," said Mary. "You shouldn't, really you shouldn't," she admonished. Skillikki and Garbo giggled.

"But they like it," protested Cam. "You don't mind a bit, do you? After all, I am teaching you how to speak English. Tell Mary what you say when you are asked how you are."

Silence, broken by "Nay, skillikki." We came to like them immensely, however, and there soon was perfect understanding beneath the broken Icelandic we spoke and the broken English they spoke. But Cam never did get them to say "cooking with gas, kid." Somehow, they were afraid that it had a double meaning.

SHORTLY after our session with G-2 and the General, we were fitted to gas masks and helmets. Gas-mask drill, we were instructed, came every Wednesday at one o'clock and lasted until one-thirty. No matter where we were at the time, or what we were doing, we were required to wear the mask during that period. We burst into muffled laughter when we saw one another disguised in those long-snouted affairs. We were characters out of a mad Disney dream; Micky Mouse, one of the Three Little Pigs, and Dumbo, all combined.

After fifteen minutes or so, one perspires freely in a gas mask and the goggles become cloudy. "Say, don't we get windshield wipers with these things?"

"Yes; if you will look in your mask container you will find a fluid which, when applied to the goggles, will prevent them from misting," we were told. When the masks have been fitted properly, they set comfortably, however, for the soft spongy rubber conforms to the face with amazing faithfulness. Leaks are tested by squeezing the tube that leads from the face mask to the filter. If you feel a slight tickling sensation about the jaw, and are still able to breathe, air is escaping and the mask must be adjusted by means of the head straps. Again the mask is tested; and this time, if you can neither inhale nor exhale, your mask is okay.

After a half-hour in a gas mask many of us noted a rash about our chins and jaws. This was definitely not a beauty treatment. Others confessed to a feeling of suffocation. This sense of restriction was doubtless brought about by the little rubber "exhaust port," which could discharge only so much spent air at a time. Therefore you were forced to regulate your breathing according to the capacity of the port. If you did not, you either encountered resistance and felt suffocated, or you sounded like a disgruntled snapping turtle as the overburdened gadget vibrated with clicks, snorts and wheezes.

One officer told me that he was firmly convinced the process of filtration had everything to do with the sudden and quite mysterious disappearance of his erstwhile bad cold. But when I told my hut-mates,

DIGGING IN

all suffering with bad colds, of this new cure, it was greeted with sour and disillusioned disapproval: "We don't intend to prove it by wearing these contraptions any longer than we have to!" Okay, it was just a suggestion, I thought.

To keep ourselves fit we took exercises in the morning, and for a while everybody stooped, rolled and grunted faithfully. Eventually exercises were abandoned without compunction, for our work kept us active enough to make us forego such deliberate, unnecessary exertion. By that time everyone but Doris Thain, Cam, and I had been in the hospital at one time or another. There seemed to be no other real cure for a cold. Then, when one had been discharged as cured, there remained a hacking hollow cough, which the soldiers told us was the "Reykjavik Rasp." It sounded worse than it was, but our huts resounded with periodic fits of coughing; an annoying affliction which remained with us the year round.

In the early days we enjoyed our walks to Reykjavik—about three miles from the hospital. In our ramblings in and about the capital we found ourselves pleasantly lost in the rather confusing pattern of winding streets, alleys and squares. The city, we thought, was a little too modern to be considered "quaint" but we were intrigued with our early explorations. There were Five and Tens, apothecary shops where only drugs were sold, novelty shops, knit shops and even small department stores such as

one would find in any American city. There were several fine bookshops well stocked with books from all over the world, and innumerable printing shops. When we heard that there were twenty or more newspapers and many periodicals that were published regularly, we realized that the Icelanders must be an extremely well-read people.

Of course, before we could launch ourselves upon a shopping tour we were obliged to learn the Icelandic money exchange, for we were not permitted to pass American currency. A krona was worth about fifteen cents in our money at that time. A hundred aurar made a krona in coins of one, two, five, ten and twenty-five pieces. It was very easy to understand. Kronur were issued in bills of one, five, ten and so on; and in coins of one and two. Soldiers, during the first months of occupation, had sent coins home as souvenirs, a practice which threatened to put a crimp in the banking system. After this was forbidden by the Army, the Icelandic bankers issued less coins and more paper money. The bills looked very much like cigar coupons to us, and were virtually handled as such. We spent this money lavishly whenever we went to town. Most of it went to the jewelry shops, for silversmiths led the trade in native handicrafts. Orders for jewelry had to be placed weeks in advance because the silversmiths could not keep up with the demand for bracelets, brooches and rings.

DIGGING IN

Perhaps the prettiest souvenirs were dolls dressed in the traditional native attire of the women. These dolls had blond or red hair hanging in long braids down the back. On the head of each was a little black velvet skull cap, to which was attached a very long tassel drawn through a silver ring. Over a white full-sleeved blouse was laced a black sleeveless vest or bodice. Completing this quaint costume was a long black skirt set off by a colorful apron of almost equal length. This doll sold at from five to eight dollars, and in great quantities.

The young women themselves rarely wear the native costume, however. They dress like American or English girls; and I was told that many rely on the cinemas for their fashions. They are quite good-looking, keen, energetic, and are very active in all trades, as they have had to be because their men have gone to sea for generations. It is rumored that the women outnumber the men eight to one because so many men have been lost at sea. Icelandic children of the toddler age are also very pretty, with their large blue eyes, blond hair and rosy cheeks. The young men, many of whom dress in belted tan overalls, are strangely delicate of build. They too have rosy cheeks and large blue eyes, and their faces are fine-featured and sensitive. They wear their blond wavy hair Continental fashion, long.

Automobiles, American and British, trucks and bi-

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

cycles sped about the narrow streets of this little city; people hurried along the sidewalks in great numbers; and we had to laugh when we remembered that the people at home thought we were going to live among the Esquimaux.

3

"HUT-NUTTY" OR "SAGA-GAGA"?

AT FIRST our program of recreation was so diffused, so interlaced with shipping and building priorities, red tape, blind alleys and experiments, that it did not fall into any distinct pattern. Many were the military and civilian obstacles, both material and prejudicial, to hamper its development. Nor could our program become clearly defined until precedents were established. It was largely our task to develop these precedents either by trial-and-error or shooting-in-the-dark methods. To do so we first had to unlearn many recreation theories that had been acquired by training or experience. For the first six months, technicalities that had been applicable in the States played a very small part in Iceland. We were to learn soon enough that the term "recreation" embraced a multitude of duties, ranging from the scrubbing of floors and sewing on buttons for soldiers to conducting, without benefit of song sheets, a community sing for a hundred men.

For three days after our arrival we eagerly anticipated our first duties: where and what would they

be, and who would receive the first assignment? On the third day I was notified that I was to be assigned to the hospital . . . back to my old job again. This news came as a disconcerting surprise to me. In Washington I had been scheduled to work among "able-bodied" soldiers, and for over a month I had been planning along those lines. I was somewhat disappointed not to be able to go through with my tentative program and thus "pioneer" a new field, but I received comfort from my hut-mates, who envied me because at least I had my assignment, while they continued to remain in a state of suspense.

Had I been entertaining any idea, however, that hospital work in Iceland was comparable to my work at Fort Belvoir, I was pleasantly mistaken. It was as new and unexplored a field as could be desired by the most inveterate pioneer.

While on the surface the policies governing the relationship between Red Cross and hospital staff remained the same, the recreation and welfare needs among the hospitalized soldiers presented us with entirely new problems. While the majority of hospital duties in the States revolve about financial aid to the patient or his family, and similar assistance in the matter of convalescent furloughs, this was decidedly not the case in Iceland. There were no furloughs, convalescent or otherwise, in those early days. And furthermore it was a rare, isolated case which required financial aid from the Red Cross. On the con-



THE GENERAL

"He hurries through, fearing to disturb them and bring them to attention."

trary, the patients had so much money that they did not know what to do with it—and therein lay my problem. It is customary to do small errands for the bed-ridden soldier; and these chores, although extracurricular in the sense of “recreation,” do contribute to morale and are among the duties assigned to the recreation worker. It is also her duty to see that the patients do not go without toilet articles and tobacco for lack of money, and so these needs are supplied free-of-charge by the worker.

On my first trip through the ward huts I was amazed to hear the jingle of coins as I asked the patients what I could do for them. The result: I had orders that amounted, *per patient*, to something like two cartons of cigarettes, one carton of candy, a tube of shaving cream, three packages of razor blades, one case of fruit juices, toothpaste, a toothbrush and perhaps a box of cigars! This being the “need,” I must fill it to the best of my ability; and in doing so it was not without a fervent prayer that these were exceptional orders, inasmuch as there had been no one before me to do the errands. (Such was not altogether the case, of course, for both the Medical Corpsmen and the Army Nurses were in the habit of doing little errands from time to time.) Because the patients were extremely generous among themselves, however, these supplies were consumed in an amazingly short while, and they were ready to give me another large order before the week was out. The situation

threatened to absorb my entire time in taking the orders, doing the errands a mile or so from the hospital with thumb-a-ride transportation, sorting the purchases and change and delivering both to the individual patients at the rate of over a hundred separate transactions a week.

This was a far cry from recreation. Eventually, though, the hospital patients were included in the island-wide rationing of merchandise, a measure which allowed me to devote more time to the actual recreation requirements; and in doing so I stumbled across a rather startling revelation: the patient morale was by far the best on the island. And why not? The hospitalized soldier was sleeping between sheets for the first time in many months and was being attended by American nurses, perhaps the first women he had seen and talked to since leaving the States. Also, perhaps he was enjoying the first opportunity in months to read. Perhaps his food was better than he had had in his own outfit. There was no guard duty, no dock detail, no battling with the elements in these snug ward huts. Instead, there was a great deal of visiting among the ambulatory patients, with yarn-swapping, card-playing (with forbidden but high stakes) and other games very much in evidence from morning till night.

Since there was no recreation ward where the ambulatory patients could find diversions of a less sedentary nature, many were in the habit of taking

walks in and about the huts for exercise. When and where it was allowed, phonograph records were played, and quite often I loaned my guitar and Nancy's accordion to musically inclined patients, who did much to entertain their hut-mates. For those desperately ill there was, of course, very little that I could offer while they were in that condition, so, until we were able to offer the convalescents a place where we could give them recreation of a more entertaining nature, my job was more or less that of a glorified errand girl. Our limited supply of games and books was kept in constant circulation, which meant that Miss Ettienne Baldwin, our Assistant Field Director, and I never went our round without our arms full.

While distributing the stationery that was so much in demand, I frequently wrote letters for men who were unable to do so. In more than one case a trusting Lothario asked me not only to write, but compose as well, a love letter to his girl back home. I always felt that this was a rather risky undertaking, yet, hating to say no, I'd suggest that he dictate what he wanted me to write. Dictation of this nature was always of great interest to the entire ward, a target for quips, suggestions and kibitzing in general. If the volley of wit grew too sharp, I was told: "Aw, tell her the girls here are pretty, but not as pretty as you, honey," after which the author of this compendious sentiment would roll over to hide his

blushes under the bedclothes. And many were the instances of letters from the girl friends bearing little complexities such as: "If you loved me as much as I love you, you would write more than you do." These letters were shown to me and I would be asked what, under such censored conditions, could be written to afford more frequent correspondence? I hardly knew the answer to that because I had my own difficulties—trying to keep my letters from resembling mimeographed copies of past correspondence.

Nor was this business of being asked to read letters from home confined to hospitalized men; the same requests came from the able-bodied soldiers as well. With many it was a simple case of pride in receiving good letters, or "sugar reports," but more often the letters bore problems that weighed upon the minds of the men who received them; little, thoughtless, complaining sentences that resulted in another case number in the files of the Field Director who, to ease the mind of the recipient, would put through a laborious but tireless investigation of "home conditions." Sometimes these investigations, after many weeks of work (and of worry on the part of the soldier), would reveal that no dire need or trouble had even existed—just a momentary low mood which the writer had selfishly or thoughtlessly sought to work off in a letter. When a man is away from home—and so far away that the prospects of getting home in a

hurry are none—he worries about home conditions unless he gets top-notch letters saying that “All are well.” If the wife so much as carelessly states that “baby has a bad cold,” the soldier has visions of his baby dying in the three-or-four-week period the letter took in getting to him. Letters like these, sending a man into the kind of doldrums that only those in Foreign Service can understand, were what I called “subversive material.”

Of the letters you must read and share with the soldiers, I soon found, there are many, too many, whose contents poison the morale. Complaining, gloomy and filled with vaguely veiled threats and petty accusations—such letters send many a man into a fit of hopeless brooding for days on end. Almost better not to get any mail at all . . . well, almost. “Look, she’s quit me. . . . Well, I kind of thought she would. She’s been writing about this guy for a couple of months now. Sending the ring back. . . .” He trails off sadly and forlornly. “But look,” I say, “isn’t it better that you found out *now* instead of later? You wouldn’t want to have to be married to her for ten years and *then* find out that she wasn’t the right one after all, now, would you?” He shrugs his shoulders. “Maybe you’re right, but well . . . it’s hard to take when you’ve been counting on it for so long.” Yes, we know how he feels.

Some you manage to buck up with: “Oh, what do you care? You’re young and handsome and there are

plenty of fish left in the sea. . . . More likely she'll be the one to be sorry some day, not you." A few discouraging letters can be excused on the grounds of dire emergency. A family in desperate straits may write to their soldier in a direct appeal for help, and this sort of trouble you can get your teeth into; diligent work on the part of the Field Director and the Red Cross Chapter in the soldier's home town can clear the matter up in short order. But when letters from home are laden with gloom you share the unhappiness they impart to their readers, and in such empathy you consign their authors to the devil.

However, there were letters that were masterpieces of humor and interest, and I silently blessed their authors while I read them. Some, too, were unconsciously poetic—though none quite matched the sentiment I once had seen, to a colored patient at Fort Belvoir, whose wife had ended her chatty letter to him with: "You are my all-day study and my midnight dream. . . ."

THERE were likewise walking cases of "ocean survivors" who, suffering from shock and exposure, required clothing, toilet articles and smoking tobacco and were discharged in a few days. But there were more serious cases of torpedo victims. I was most impressed by the young survivors of one vessel who had suffered terrible burns all over their bodies. Their courage and cheerfulness during an extremely

painful convalescence were unparalleled by anything I ever had seen or hope to see again. In the final stages of “skin-peeling” they poked a good deal of fun at one another as bit by bit the brand-new skin of a baby-pink hue came to light. In time they were completely healed and not a sign of a scar remained. When their day of discharge arrived, Miss Baldwin and I were sorry to see them go, and I am sure that the doctors and nurses who had pulled them through were just as sorry. From the zero hour that marked their admittance to the hospital with hardly a 50-50 chance, their condition had called for the utmost in medical skill and nursing. To have to return to an assortment of minor ailments after such inspiring work was, I know, a let-down for the nurses.

There were, of course, many others to follow after these survivors; but of great immediate interest to me were the men who had been injured in the terrific windstorm that our convoy had missed by several days. One patient had a deep zigzag cut from his elbow down to the palm of his hand, caused by coming in contact with a large sheet of corrugated metal that had blown off the roof of a hut. He said that he, too, was flying through the air when it happened, and was thankful that he got it in the arm and not in the neck! From all accounts, I gathered that everything and everybody was up in the air that day. I was told of an entire hut which was wafted up to a good altitude, leaving the floor and four men sitting

foolishly about the stove. Ships in the harbor dragged anchor and scuttled for the shore while trucks were lifted bodily off the roads. I was told that in some cases the wind reached a velocity of 135 MPH. Guide ropes had had to be put up between the huts at the hospital, and even at that the heaviest corpsmen had to convoy the nurses back and forth. In a way, I was sorry to have missed the excitement, but perhaps it was just as well. Locations where lumber was stored still looked as though giants had been playing "pick-up-sticks," and great masses of corrugated metal lay strewn at random about the countryside.

This was certainly not like other islands, and the patients reveled in the opportunity to tell a fresh-from-the-States rookie like me its worst possible features. Furthermore, they enjoyed teasing me, and would ask if I wasn't a little crazy to have come to "a rock like this." They said that if I was not already crazy, I would be soon—only they called it "wind-wacky" and "hut-nutty." I refrained from telling them that perhaps I was "saga-gaga," which might have been the reason I had come. Naturally there was a slang term for everything, and everybody had a nickname, from the "Old Man" right down the line. They called Miss Baldwin "Georgia" because she hailed from that state, and, though no one knows why, they called me "Gadget," a name which clung to me the whole year.

They were a grand bunch of boys, who entertained

me, for the most part, far more than I entertained them. Were it not for the fact that Red Cross also supplies the needs of the medical staff and corpsmen as well as those of the patients, I would have had little or no recreation problems. However, from the start I was particularly interested in the corpsmen because of what I had gathered from Joe, our striker. In his frequent visits to our hut to tend our fire he unconsciously gave us, in his broken ramblings about his comrades and work, an insight into a rather unhappy situation among the corpsmen. Although I sorted the wheat from the chaff and took it all with a grain of salt, I felt that there might be something we could do for them. It was true, as Joe said, that the men “didn’t have no place to go to have some fun.” Fun meant a dance because at a dance there were girls. For almost five months the men had been working themselves into a lather over the fact that they had not been able to have a dance on the Post, and by the time we arrived this complaint had grown to such proportions that it had become a springboard for a thousand other little grievances.

It appeared, then, that all one had to do in order to make the able-bodied men happy was to give them dances. I elected myself to this task, and in so doing experienced my first entanglement with the red tape of hospital, military, civilian and American Red Cross policies. I was obliged to make clearances

down the long line of authorities, and with each it was the same answer: "We want to give these men dances, of course, but under the present conditions it is impossible." And the conditions were indeed as impossible as they were innumerable. At that time the Icelanders frowned heavily upon young ladies who were so indiscreet as to attend dances of an open-invitation nature. The military frowned heavily upon activities that might offend the native fathers and thus jeopardize the then somewhat nebulous good will between the Icelanders and the troops stationed there. So, without the girls, there could be no dances.

Undaunted, however, the men felt that they could still have a dance if the nurses and Red Cross "girls" would come. You see, they really wanted dances—and no amount of reasoning and explaining could convince them that it was an impossibility at that time. They were stubbornly blind to the fact that military rank is necessary to maintain order and discipline, without which no army could hope to win a war. They could not understand why rank must stick with rank in social matters; and although it was explained that this was simply a military law which covered the social activities of the nurses, they remained loudly resentful. The one alternative, that we eleven women of the Red Cross give a dance for two hundred men, was possible, insofar as rank was concerned; but by this time the rest of our group

“HUT-NUTTY” OR “SAGA-GAGA”?

were hard at work on nightly camp programs and no one could be spared.

Among other grievances: the recreation facilities for the hospital corpsmen were relatively few and were confined to one small hut which, in leisure moments, they used as their “day room.” It was pathetically inadequate, as I was quick to discover the first night a community sing and get-together program was given there. The pool table which we had given them took up most of the space, the lighting was poor and the card tables, chairs, and desks were already at a stage to be retired from the active duty imposed upon them. This British-built hut was of such early vintage that its dirty paint, leaking roof and tired-out appearance in general could hardly be expected to offer a cheerful refuge. Upon inquiry, the lieutenant in charge of morale informed me that plans had been under way to build a large recreation hut, but that the construction of hospital ward huts had, of course, priority. It looked as though a new recreation hut would be such a long time coming that it was advisable to paint, redecorate and try to improve the ancient “day hut.”

As soon as the word got around that we had received official approval to do this, a hue and cry was raised all over the hospital. The tailor wanted the hut for his shop, and so did the barber. The pool addicts wanted it reserved as a billiard parlor and the chaplains wanted to use it for services. The De-

tachment Office finally settled the matter by taking it over as quarters for several M.P. guards who were temporarily attached to the hospital. They slept in shifts, which allowed the corpsmen very little time in which to use the hut, and afforded a gloomy and disheartening outlook for the morale officer and myself. Our plans hung fire until the shifts of somnolent guards departed. Once again the hue and cry over possession was resumed; and during the bickering and bidding (which it looked as though the tailor might win) an uncommonly impossible rumor began to circulate.

In the Army, as is well known, all rumors are strange and impossible, and all emanate from "reliable sources," the reliability of which can never be confirmed any more than the source can be discovered; and although a good rumor is never thoroughly believed, it enjoys a brief existence of popularity over an amazingly large area—that is, until a bigger and better rumor comes along. As a rookie sheds his gullibility he becomes more particular in selecting the rumor he wishes to pass on to his fellow-men as credible. When he becomes a veteran he is so jaded and sated by rumors that he simply hands the most absurd ones on to the rookies, like feeding peanuts to monkeys. There is no such thing as a fact in the Army; there are orders—and rumors. It is a "believe it when you see it" sort of existence.

Thus, the strange and impossible rumor that con-

“HUT-NUTTY” OR “SAGA-GAGA”?

struction was about to begin on a recreation house was not believed until, several days later, sure enough, the ribs of a good-sized hut were set up by the Army Engineers.

It is claimed that Army huts can be put up in a day under normal conditions. But conditions in Iceland are never quite normal enough to permit rapid construction. For one thing, the weather is so changeable as to provoke a comment once reserved for New England: “If you don’t like the weather, wait a minute.” Reduce the minute to a second, add extreme violence to each change, and you’ll have weather conditions in Iceland. A change of weather is usually introduced by a gusty, turbulent veering of the wind to another quarter. On its tail, rain, snow or perhaps even hail will come down with a staccato beat. Then, quite suddenly and from another quarter, the wind may blow it all away; the sun will bore through the clouds—and everything is just as it was a minute or two before this meteorological fury hit the countryside. Iceland—temple of Aeolus and playground of the winds, where gentle zephyrs play tag with hurricanes! Iceland, where wind velocity attains a speed of 120 MPH with little or no warning!

Only a ground hog could hope to work a 48-hour week under such weather conditions. During the winter all Army vehicles, trucks included, were stalled more than once by the high winds. And

there were other reasons as well to delay the best-laid plans of men. Although the Army moves slowly and somewhat ponderously at times, there are others who can move perhaps a bit more slowly—the laborers of Iceland. An agreement between the Icelandic labor union and the Army, wherein Icelandic labor was to do a specified amount of work on any project under construction within a specified radius of Reykjavik, was another reason why work was delayed. The Icelandic worker is leisurely and methodical about his work and philosophical about his time. He must pause frequently during the course of a day's work to drink coffee and eat his pastries. These intermissions will occur with the regularity of clock-work. No matter how unpropitious the moment, they are observed religiously. If work is not finished today, no matter . . . there is always tomorrow.

Had I let well enough alone, perhaps the whole business would have been done and over with long before it was. But, in the final stages of construction of the recreation hut, I was smitten with what I thought was a pretty smart idea; to have a fireplace built. What could be nicer for both the ambulatory patients and the corpsmen than to have a nice cheerful fireplace where they could toast their toes? To negotiate for this innovation, I was obliged to make clearances down the same old "long line of authorities" who this time, one by one, thought it feasible and approved accordingly. There was but one last,

and most important, sanction to be obtained—the Engineers’. Lieutenant “Morale” thought that it might not be forthcoming, as labor and material were at a premium. If not, he thought that we could build it without the Engineers, using lava rock. (I later learned that lava rock is apt to contain a gaseous element which explodes at a certain temperature!) I was not so pessimistic, however, and was successful in my quest for the final okay.

In a few days there appeared at the scene of action three vague-looking gentlemen who represented the Icelandic labor union, and one lone and wrathful sergeant of the Army Engineers. The native gentlemen explained with gestures, and in ancient Norse which no one understood, that they were to help build a fireplace. The sergeant, almost inarticulate with profane rage, led us to understand that somehow a “fast one” had been pulled on him: his detail of three soldiers had not shown up, and he said he’d be damned if he was going to do all the work! Up to this point it had been like rolling off a log; the maze of red tape had been cleared, the worst was over and the fireplace would be burning merrily in a few days. So I thought, in my innocence. Ah, but little did I know that the days would stretch into weeks as the sergeant cursed the three soldiers who never did show up.

Yes, the days became weeks as the three Icelanders toiled leisurely in moments between intermit-

tent repasts of coffee and cakes and frequent holidays. Meetings and church services were held while a great gap in the roof admitted snow, rain and chilly winds. This, of course, was bad enough, but the final stroke came just as the fireplace was completed and we were about to move in with recreation equipment: the hut was taken over as a motion-picture theater. And who can possibly imagine a fireplace in a theater?

It is granted that movies are essential in a well-balanced program which includes group singing, parties, shows, ping-pong and pool. But movies three times a day, every day but one, could hardly be thought a suitable answer to the urgent call for diversified recreation. And indeed the situation did not look very promising for the variety program we promised to conduct in that location. There was, however, an explanation to justify the sudden change of plans: the first motion-picture equipment had just arrived, and this new recreation hut was the only available space in which to show the films. Also, because of its proximity to other camps, many men would be able to enjoy the shows. Therefore, the hut was to serve as a temporary theater until such time as one could be built for that express purpose. But in the Army, "temporary" might mean months—or it might mean never.

There was but one alternative: we were to have the hut one day a week for a show of some sort. The



SWEET AND HOT AT "THE HOOPEN"

"I never knew until later that I was asked to play the saxophone . . . because I 'made such faces."

corpsmen were as anxious to put on a show as they were to have a dance; and at least, I thought, that much could be done for them. Several men were talented, and with this material on hand it was believed that a good variety show could be presented. The acts had to be worked up according to the individual talent; musical instruments and music must be loaned the performers before rehearsals could begin. Trouble developed: the performers had no place to practice on their own, and when it came time to have the first rehearsal there was no place in which to have it. The theater was in use from one o'clock noon to eleven at night, every day but one—and there could be no morning rehearsals, for unfortunately there are such things as ward duty, guard duty, K.P. When the performers realized that they were not going to be entirely relieved of their duties, we were forced to postpone the show another month. It began to look as though I were destined to spend my entire year in a rat-race instead of working on a recreation program.

BETSY LANE QUINLAN, by now recreation worker at a distant and somewhat isolated hospital, was also having her troubles. Although we were both doing the same kind of work, and the basic recreation needs were alike, our difficulties in supplying these needs were in no way comparable. Because of the location, hers was a more material problem—a business of hav-

ing to go without theatrical costumes, make-up and musical instruments. In due time the equipment arrived, and with the splendid co-operation of the entire medical staff Betsy was able to produce an excellent show. She also worked in the hospital from 8:30 to five and volunteered as a camp worker in the evenings.

Doris Thain and Ethel Rea had been assigned to a chaplain's hut in a near-by fishing village. It was not an all-round satisfactory arrangement, for the hut did not belong to the Red Cross; and what we wanted were centers of our own in which we could feel free to conduct the type of program we thought best. Their commuting problems, too, were such that they were obliged to hitchhike to and from, most of the time. This, plus the fact that the shortage of camp workers was becoming acute, culminated in their transfer to the itinerant program.

Also commuting daily and under difficult conditions were Mary Dolliver and Betty Clark. Their camp was located a good many miles from the hospital, and when the road was not dust-laden and bumpy it was muddy and slow. Sometimes storm warnings would ground all transportation and delay them interminably. However, theirs I think was the most enviable position of all: the hut had been completely turned over to them to do with as they wished. Only it was not exactly a hut. It was a rambling af-

“HUT-NUTTY” OR “SAGA-GAGA”?

fair of more-or-less square proportions, generally described as “The Missouri Hogpen.”

Mary and Betty were obliged to put a good many back-breaking hours of preparation into this hut, as it had formerly been a store house. Floors had to be scrubbed, walls and ceilings painted and the roof repaired. Curtain material had to be found (not an easy job), measured, cut and stitched, and together they worked long after curfew. Furniture had to be obtained somehow. It was. Many of the chairs were made from packing-box boards and gone over with a blowtorch for trimming. A newspaper rack and library shelves were produced in the same fashion. Games, books and magazines almost drained our meager stock, but it was worth it. Somewhere a small juke box was begged, borrowed or stolen. When in the Army, one never asks where anything comes from—one takes it and says “thanks.”

Exactly where the piano did come from I was never able to ascertain, because Mary was always elusive and vague regarding its source. A piano in Iceland was a rare thing in those dark ages. It was also a most desirable thing, too. No matter how aged, decrepit, beaten up or worn out, a piano was a gem to be haggled over, fought over or stolen. Its sounding board might be cracked many times over, every third key missing, and perhaps not even two notes in harmony with each other . . . no matter, it was

still a piano. I can't honestly say that Mary's piano fitted the above description, but it was a veteran upright which required a good deal of fussing over to get it into tune. In spite of its frequent lapses into tuneless depressions, the old battle-scarred box served long and well under the relentless beating of a thousand hands.

With the aid of this piano Mary was able to rehearse a show for the opening night. This was to be an extremely important occasion because it was the first big program to be given in the first camp recreation center under the auspices of the American Red Cross. By coaxing and wheedling, Mary managed to have the secretaries released from their duties as assistant camp workers, for, she said, "The boys enjoy so much having the pretty, young girls come to their parties." As a matter of fact, everybody turned out for this affair, and The Hogpen was packed to capacity. The General looked in when the party was at its peak, and he seemed very well pleased with what he saw. The entertainment flowed endlessly. No sooner would a hill billy finish his harmonica number than a tenor or a comedian would step up and take over. The talent for this show was so well selected and coached by Mary that it later formed part of a musical variety show, the first to be given by the Armed Forces in Iceland. Many of these men had come over on our ship, and it was not necessary to break the ice to get them to entertain for us.

“HUT-NUTTY” OR “SAGA-GAGA”?

Also, some of the boys had been lucky enough to bring their own musical instruments from the States. Outstanding was the hill-billy quartet, consisting of three Spanish guitars and one electric Hawaiian guitar. These performers were versatile and clever to a professional degree. There were also several fine voices. One Italian boy, who might have promised to be a second Caruso had he the training, was one of the high lights in the opening program. His colorful interpretations from *Pagliacci* and *Il Trovatore* held spellbound even the men who denounced such singing as “too highbrow.” However, his high spirits kept him in hot water, or in the doghouse, most of the time, and before all future programs Mary was obliged to keep him on a straight and narrow path, worrying that he might be clapped into the guard-house before his performance was over.

Among other acts at the opening were two Medical Corpsmen from my hospital. One played a hot sax and the other an equally hot guitar. They were good until Mary induced me to “sit in” with them, and then the act turned into a comedy. I never knew until later that I was asked to play the saxophone not because I could play it, for I couldn’t very well, but because I “made such faces.” I didn’t care; if the boys enjoyed it, I’m sure that I did, too. Everything was greatly enjoyed that night, and the stamping and whistling and general hilarity came to an end with everybody singing “God Bless America.”

But The Hogpen was not without its problems. Three days later the roof (supposedly repaired) developed leaks that stained and spotted the fresh paint on the ceilings.

Space, the lack of which always had us doing things the hard way, was everybody's problem. From the moment we put foot on Iceland, we were willing to make the best of a so-called "temporary" condition of living and working; and it is a good thing we did not know that these conditions would stretch into months. As it was, we kept going in anticipation of our big Center. At first it was thought that we might be able to secure the Odd Fellows Hall in Reykjavik. When that was not available, numerous other locations were held up for consideration and then turned down because they were not available either. Meanwhile it was decided that the office of Civilian Relief could be moved into the apartment that was eventually secured as living quarters for Messrs. McDonald, Hagan and Russell, the various Directors. In comparison to the humble huts, this apartment building was very swank in appearance, and it soon became known as "Buckingham Palace."

This move relieved the situation in the Field Director's hut, but the recreation department was obliged to remain there for a good many months after. The phones still jangled with countless requests for equipment and for our camp programs which we could not grant. Although the American

“HUT-NUTTY” OR “SAGA-GAGA”?

Red Cross had sent \$230,000 worth of equipment to Iceland, it was not within our power to distribute any part of it. As soon as the equipment had arrived it was turned over to Special Service, which made the distributions. This was a point which the majority of the soldiers could never understand. We could not supply them with ping-pong balls, games, musical instruments; their requests had to be channeled, like everything else, through their Company Morale or Special Service Officer, and he had to repeat the request to the Special Service Staff. The same system applied to our camp programs. A schedule of the camps to be visited was made up by the Special Service Staff and issued to us weekly. The schedule was then broken down in such a way as to have two workers assigned to a camp. We usually received our schedule at the Monday morning meetings, and this allowed us a little time in which to prepare our programs for the camps we were to visit for that week.

During those meetings we often reviewed the programs of the previous week and analyzed them for flaws. Our weekly reports, in which we gave an accounting of our activities in detail, were also up for discussion. Whatever our individual problems, we aired them before the others; and in many cases the forthcoming suggestions were of great benefit to us all. For the first six months these reports were of the utmost importance in establishing the more orderly routine that eventually went into effect. Until

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

then Iceland was more or less the proving ground for that vast world-wide program which now has been matured.

No matter how crude and experimental our first camp programs were, the men enjoyed them. We were asked to return again and again. Within a month of our arrival the requests were so many and camp workers so few that it led to my eventual transfer from the hospital to the camp program.

WE HAD been spreading ourselves rather thin in more ways than one. As British Occupation dwindled, American Occupation increased; more and more new camps were added to our schedule. We could not hope to cover all camps and pay them a second visit within a reasonable length of time. Thus we attended enlisted men's dinners, their outdoor sports competitions, and their parties, known as organization dances. These dances can never be forgotten by anyone who has attended them in the capacity of hostess! "Organization dance" might mean that several small camps, representing the same outfit, pooled their resources, hired the one available hut on the one free week-day evening, and attended four hundred strong. It might also mean that only one large camp would give a dance; but always there were gate crashers, and oftentimes the small hut would be packed with over six hundred men. These dances had been averaging about one every four months per organiza-

tion, because of the long list of other camps which were awaiting their turn. Usually, whether or not a soldier danced, he availed himself of the opportunity to attend. Consequently, the small hut was jammed with stags from half-past seven to eleven-thirty. We ARC girls—two, and sometimes three—arrived on the scene at seven o'clock and rendered assistance in the preparation of the refreshments. At seven-thirty the orchestra arrived and by eight o'clock all the soldiers had squeezed in and were looking about the hut hopefully for feminine partners.

“May I have this dance?” This request comes from all sides but you can only smile and take the one nearest you. “Gee, it sure does seem good to be dancing with an American girl again. . . . Sure, these Skillikkis dance all right, but it isn't the same.” (Someone taps his shoulder.) “Aw, hey, we haven't taken three steps—gimme a break!” The interloper is firm and successful “So, you're *really* an American? Just talk! Sounds good to hear an American girl's voice again. . . . No, *no!* This isn't a cut-in, soldier!” “Well, you can't monopolize her like that.” They pause to argue and another soldier snatches the prey. “While they argue, we'll dance,” he chuckles. “No use in wasting . . .” Again the interruption, again another partner: “Jeepers, I haven't danced for five months. . . . My, you dance well.” (Actually we are simply trying to push our way through the crush, with frustrated attempts to keep time with the mu-

sic.) "Say, you must be crazy to volunteer to come to Iceland. How do . . ." Another interruption, another partner. "Just talk, little lady, just talk!" He is replaced by another, who clutches me to him and proceeds to execute some very elaborate dance steps.

Silently and somewhat grimly we swoop and whirl in the little spaces that he has found by searching over the heads of the throng. I have a feeling that I am dancing with a man on stilts. He spies another space and we are off, struggling and perspiring to get to that space before it has been filled in again. There we pivot, dip, and, in kicking, we manage to bark innumerable shins. He is doing well, I think; we have been dancing at least half a minute, and that's a record thus far. He is agile in his efforts to get clear of the stags, but I feel that I am in a marathon requiring speed and endurance despite the many obstacles. "Okay, Bud, you've had your dance." This partner offers a brief rest, for he stands first on one foot and shakes and then on the other and shakes. I catch on. We stand in one spot and shake, and I am able to cool off while listening to the torrent of words that pour from his lips. "A pretty gal like you must get tired of all these GIs now what you need is a nice feller to take care of you and protect you from all these wolves what did you say your name was how old are you and are you married where do you come from . . ." The interruption again—and *where*, I think, are the girls?

The first of the native girls usually arrived around

nine o'clock and no sooner. Toward nine we kept our eyes on the entrance in order to fulfill our most important mission: to welcome the elusive native ladies. Feeling very much like a spider luring the fly into the parlor, we were obliged to entice these coy ladies into the hut 'neath the eager, almost greedy, stare of a thousand eyes. The baited quarry were very, very shy about the whole thing. Sometimes we get them through the door by shaking hands firmly and backing into the hut all the while. The Iclander is a diligent hand-shaker; so we seized upon this ceremony as an opportunity to pull them in without actually capturing them bodily. Perhaps two or three would peek through the door. As hundreds of men surged in their direction, they would withdraw hastily and wait until their own numbers were augmented before peeking in again.

Of course, this was during the early days of the Occupation; and their “shyness” brought about the sharp accusation that Icelandic girls are chilly. There are several angles to be considered before one can condemn them as unreceptive. Our boys did not realize that they were in a land where formerly the women outnumbered the men—perhaps, as I have said, by as much as eight or ten to one. Overnight, almost, there had been a right-about-face, and now not only the women, but the entire population as well, were outnumbered many times over. Therefore it followed that certain barriers of self-protection

must be set up for and by the youthful ladies; and a cold shoulder was one of them. The girls were defying tradition, the men wanted to dance—and two American women were trying to dance with two hundred men and welcome the girls at one and the same time. It was an awkward situation for all concerned; at the organization dances, the best we could hope for was that some thirty or forty girls would appear before the evening was over.

They are not frosty by nature, nor are the Icelanders an inhospitable race. On the contrary, once you know them they are friendly, and to a most satisfying degree. But it is the matter of getting to know them that has been such a problem for our troops. In a land of tradition that allows little or no hearty innocent familiarity between the sexes in public places—a tradition which says that at a party the women are to sit by themselves when not dancing, and are to return home without escorts after the dance—well, perhaps it is inevitable that this gloomy tradition clashes when it comes face to face with the hearty American Way.

4

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

SPEAKING of moods, Iceland has many. There is a dramatic quality to this country of "frost and fire" and phenomenal contrasts. One minute gloomy and brooding in wind and rain—colorful, sunny and sparkling the next—this little island is a land of extremes, from the long summer days that never end to the dark winter nights that stretch into noon and fall again not two hours later; a land of glorious sunsets and brilliant scintillating Northern Lights; of such strange combinations as volcanoes and glaciers, of hot springs, geysers, and icy streams roaring over falls. One sees a broad vista of limitless heather-covered plateau—and right next to it bleak barren lava fields. There are gloomy fjords, some cleft so deep as never to see daylight; and yet there are green sunlit valleys in the same vicinity. And all this is condensed into the narrow confines of 40,000 square miles—somewhat smaller than Virginia.

As the days lengthened we no longer made our trips to and from the camps in complete darkness. Increasing daylight soon gave us an excellent op-

portunity to see the country, about which so little seems to be known in the United States.

The few "known" facts about Iceland are somewhat erroneous. Perhaps the most popular misconceptions have to do with weather conditions and the inhabitants: snow the year round, polar bears, igloos and Esquimaux. Many people have asked us: "Weren't you frozen all the time?" No, we were not. Iceland is not so cold as we had been led to believe. The fleece-lined coats issued to us before we left Washington were rarely buttoned up to our necks. Heavy underwear and parkas were worn only when we rode to distant camps in open trucks. The coldest temperature I ever encountered there was eight above. That was in Reykjavik, and of course it was several degrees colder in the north. What with temperatures running down to as much as thirty and forty below zero in our own New England states, though, I could hardly think of eight above as extremely cold; but the citizens of Reykjavik said it was "a wery, wery kalt day!"

However, one does feel the cold more in Reykjavik because of the extreme moisture. Reykjavik is well-named "Bay of Smokes," on account of the great number of springs that fume and boil about the city; on cold days the steam from myriad thermal pools can be seen from miles away. Also, the Gulf Stream, flowing about the south and west coasts, serves to keep Reykjavik Harbor clear of ice the year round,

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

and at the same time to moderate the climate considerably. During the summer months it naturally is warmer, yet the warmest day I recall was not over sixty degrees. Were it not for the high winds, excessive moisture and heavy precipitation both summer and winter, the climate could be considered relatively mild despite the high latitude and proximity to the North Pole.

The island barely touches the Arctic Circle at its northernmost tip. Reykjavik, located in the southwest, is less than three hundred miles from the Circle. Although Iceland is only 195 miles across, it is no simple matter to travel from one coast to the other as the crow flies. One is obliged to take the more circuitous route, following the jagged outline of the coast. To see the interior, or tableland, one must travel by pony, for this part of the island is entirely uninhabitable and is covered with glaciers, volcanic craters, lava fields, deserts and mountains. The lowlands form but one-fourteenth of the whole island and are made habitable by fertile valleys. During the brief summer season there is a wide girdle of vegetation about the island—so very green that we wondered why this was not called “Greenland,” and vice versa.

It might just as well be said that Iceland is treeless, although there are several National Forests, and a few trees where Icelanders have planted them in their yards. But these trees rarely exceed ten feet in

height. We saw two of the "forests"; one in the north where the plot of birch trees scarcely covered an acre, and one near Reykjavik where we were startled to see familiar "trees" that looked more like bushes—they were not over two feet high. We were told that this latter forest was what had come of Iceland's first step toward forestation, an experiment which, because of the high winds, did not promise favorable results. We were also told that hundreds of years ago Iceland was covered with real forests, but that they had been completely destroyed by volcanic eruptions and windstorms. Reforestation was neglected, and further growth was aborted beneath the constant grazing of livestock.

In the spring the countryside becomes dotted with sheep, and for every big one there seems to be a little white fluff trailing behind. The fleece from the sheep is very long, thin and hairlike in quality. According to American soldiers who were experienced in textiles, it was not superior wool.

There are cows, but not many. Those we did see were rather thin and rachitic. The dairies were barely able to supply the needs of the natives, which was one reason why we rarely got a glass of fresh milk. At first, we were advised not to drink the milk sold at the restaurants in town; but some months later this ban was lifted. It was rumored that our Army veterinarians had collaborated with the Icelandic farmers and dairymen in improving and testing the



OUTPOST

"Were it not for the high winds, excessive moisture and heavy precipitation both summer and winter, the climate could be considered relatively mild . . ."

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

stock, and that our doctors now had approved the milk.

Conspicuous only by their absence were dogs. There were a few in the country, but rarely was there a dog to be seen in the streets of Reykjavik. Again many rumors were born. Seemingly without scientific foundation was the rumor that the sheep carried a germ which was picked up by the dogs and transmitted to their masters, wherefore the dog was not accepted as a pet. . . . This rumor gave way to one more elaborate but equally sophistical: it was the dog that had the germ in the first place, a type of streptococcus, and both men and sheep were threatened. I eventually lost track of this rumor—and besides, I finally bought a sheepskin and did not want to think about such possibilities. I preferred to believe that the dog craze simply had not reached Iceland. The soldiers clung to the explanation that a dog couldn't live in a country which did not have trees!

Can it be that trees supply such a vast amount of oxygen that, in a treeless country, there is an oxygen deficiency of thirty per cent? This fact has never been confirmed to my own satisfaction, but it was a very popular subject for many "scientific" discussions among our soldiers. It was invariably accepted, too, as the reason why the soldiers could not be worked so hard as they were in the States. Many of the first troops to land in Iceland had to be sent to the hos-

pitals in a state of complete exhaustion, resulting from the rapid pace with which they unloaded the ships. Of course many soldiers will prefer "gold-bricking" to dock detail, but the nurses told me that the men were really too exhausted to resist colds and the flu. It was a question of "slowing down" rather than of acclimatization; and for a whole year, a feeling of enervation dogged us constantly. If we were not careful, we found ourselves in the hospital.

This was a surprising revelation to me, for one would think that a northern country, such as Iceland, would be invigorating. Soldiers who discredited the belief that it was lack of oxygen thought that the high latitude had something to do with it. Perhaps they were confused with "altitude." It was my own belief that the constant change in weather affected us both physically and mentally. I noted that our dispositions changed with the weather—and, like the barometers in that country, our moods oscillated constantly.

ICELAND is noted for its volcanic eruptions. There are over one hundred volcanoes, the largest and most formidable being Hekla, located about sixty miles from Reykjavik—much too near for comfort, so I thought. Hekla is a live volcano which erupts with periodic regularity, but for one reason or another she was four years overdue. I was quite happy to have her, him, or it remain in a state of hibernation, al-

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

though I probably missed seeing a wonderful sight. The Icelanders never appeared worried or concerned over possible eruptions. Their fine disregard for the potent qualities of Hekla leads one to believe that an eruption is nothing. She just spews her molten lava all over the countryside, kills the livestock, lays waste the crops, destroys homes along with a good number of the population—and that's all, there's really nothing to it. When asked what would happen to Reykjavik and neighboring towns in the event of a blow-off, the natives simply smile and shrug their shoulders and treat the subject lightly: they will cross that bridge when they come to it.

Some volcanos are heavily covered with snow and ice, and their eruptions are catastrophic. In one of these upheavals an entire population of forty farms—lock, stock and barrel—was swept into the sea by the rush of water, huge blocks of ice and molten lava. Countless past volcanic eruptions have left in their wake tragic years of disease and famine. Yet the Ice-lander continues to live next door to these devil's breweries.

We saw innumerable lava fields, no two of which appeared to be alike in their rock formation. There were fields where the hot lava must have cooled and hardened while flowing smoothly, suggesting a fossilized river. Other streams had overrun and broadened across a wide area, and in the process had been broken up into large rocks by the series of earth-

quakes that often accompanies eruptions. Great gaps and fissures also resulted.

Fine lava rock prevails; during a dry spell, minute particles of volcanic dust are deposited everywhere. The eyes, nose and throat suffer during these spells, and hair and clothes require frequent brushing and cleaning. Because of the coarse and abrasive nature of fine lava rock, shoes do not stand up well, for which reason cobblers and shoe shops do a thriving business at all times.

Iceland is a land of many lakes. Most of them are old volcanic craters which are fed by glacial streams. Vacationists motor or cycle to these lakes, pitch their tents along the shores and camp American style. Yet there is little boating or swimming to be seen. We learned that Icelanders prefer to swim in pools heated by water from the hot springs. Those springs, sulphurous or carbonic, are scattered all over the island. They boil to the surface and their streams remain dangerously hot for a good distance away from the source.

With all these formidable interruptions, it is a wonder that there is any vegetation at all. Yet the Icelander is able to produce, for a brief period, exquisite flowers. This is accomplished in hothouses heated by the thermal springs. Roses and poppies are most popular, but there is a wide variety of flowers to be had. In the same manner vegetables are grown, with long thin cucumbers and rather small tomatoes

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

predominating in all the markets. Their size and flavor, however, are not up to our standard.

Ponies are to be seen everywhere—the most faithful and reliable means of transportation over the primitive Icelandic roads. Of course, trucks and pleasure cars are in evidence, but the bulk of the hauling is done by the ponies. They are sturdy well-formed little animals; the working pony looks very much like a pocket edition of the American draft horse. In the North the riding ponies are so delicately bred that they resemble small race horses, and, as a matter of fact, they are raced. At the seasonal meetings held near Reykjavik, one finds that the noisy betting and the general hubbub are similar to the excitement at race courses in the States.

Innumerable holidays and long weekends make it possible for the Icелander to enjoy whatever sports and recreation his little country affords. Fishing in the streams and hiking over the lava fields and mountains, he takes advantage of the interminable days. In the winter, whenever low temperatures permit, there is a little skating and skiing; the Icелander is only mildly athletic, and he does not overindulge in any particular sport. He likes to ride, play golf, swim and wrestle. A peculiar form of wrestling is the national specialty. Icelandic wrestlers wear long white gym suits, leather straps about their waists and thighs, and a stern purposeful look on their faces. They do not grimace formidably, grunt, or put on

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

any kind of show, other than that of strength and dexterity. I should add that it is also a display of endurance, for the idea is literally to throw the opponent to the floor. He is not forced down gradually—he is picked up bodily by means of his straps, and if he is not lively enough to escape he is plunged to the floor with a resounding thud. This fall constitutes a point against him. If it has not broken his back, he comes to his feet for another round. He grasps his opponent's straps and they both waltz about in a lively fashion until one or the other heaves mightily and again there is a thud that would kill anyone not hardened to it. They fight clean and fair and the better man wins, but it is a sport that only the natives can understand and enjoy.

ICELANDIC homes are modern, well furnished and quite comfortable. Town houses of cement are built along modernistic flat-roofed lines, with extremely large windows. They have British plumbing in kitchens and bath rooms, and the heating plants are quite up to date. There are also many apartment houses in Reykjavik, but rarely can a flat be found that is available, for the city's normal population of 40,000 has more than doubled while labor and materials have become scarce.

There are, however, no distinctive slums—only a section of the city where the houses do not measure up to the general standards of sanitation and ap-

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

pearance. But in the countryside, the living conditions are somewhat primitive. Although there are many farmhouses of cement or stone, there are also homes built from sod. Most of the barns are built of peat sods, which are cut out of the ground, stacked, and dried in the fields. Of course the peat bogs also supply fuel to heat the farm homes, for coal and fuel oil are at a premium.

Among the improvements our Army plans to make is the completion of a pipe line from the hot springs into the city of Reykjavik which will supply the homes and public buildings with steam heat. A rather odd rumor attached itself to this project while we were there. Early in the war the Germans, having completed the cement base or trough which runs from the springs to the city, were awaiting the arrival of the pipe to finish the job. However, the British arrived first and the project was hastily abandoned. When the American troops moved in, it was thought a good idea to pick up where the Germans had left off and finish this worthy project. The pipe was ordered and shipped from the States, but en route the convoy encountered Jerry, who must have had his sights crossed. Instead of a troop transport, the ill-fated pipe went to Davy Jones' locker with no loss of life. It was an interesting rumor, and not without irony. Again more pipe was ordered and by now, perhaps, the heating problems of the natives have been solved.

U. S. Army doctors and veterinarians are also contributing to the increasing good will between America and Iceland. It is not unusual to find the doctors of both countries co-operating in the control and treatment of certain diseases common to both man and beast. Icelandic doctors, incidentally, have worked miracles in wiping out the leprosy scourge, which at one time had that little island in a tenacious grip. Tuberculosis too is now under control. However, one sees evidence of rickets everywhere. The lack of vitamin C and of proper dental care are tragically revealed in the young as well as the old. In many cases the good looks of a young man or woman are marred by badly decayed teeth, or even by their total absence.

We were surprised to learn that the insanity rate was about average. We had thought it would be high in a country whose inhabitants are so closely bred that no new blood has been introduced for generations and generations. Also, we received quite a jolt when we observed that not all mental cases are confined to institutions. While traveling through remote fishing villages we saw, from time to time, idiots or imbeciles wandering about the streets unattended.

Illegitimacy, however, runs above average, and is not too severely frowned upon. Children born out of wedlock receive the same advantages, care and education as legitimate children; society places no

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

stigma on them. But prostitution and conduct contrary and offensive to the traditions of the country are sharply dealt with.

The average Icelander is perhaps better educated than the average American. There is little illiteracy and people are amazingly well informed, doubtless owing to the fact that they are omnivorous readers. Their literary output, per capita, is the greatest in the world. Not only does the Icelander attend the National University in Reykjavik; he polishes off his education in universities all over the world, and many of the girls are sent to England and America for their schooling, though not because Icelandic schools are inadequate but because the Icelander is an ardent traveler at heart.

I was told that several Icelandic colonies flourish in the United States, but that many of the colonists have normally been in the habit of returning regularly to their homeland. Braving conditions of travel which can hardly be called pleasant, Icelanders are still visiting back and forth between their country and the United States. Their little steamships join the big convoys that come and go, and (rumor) quite often they travel alone and unescorted. Disregarding the ever-present threat of submarines, their coastal steamers continue to operate on a regular schedule affected only by the elements. Fishing boats also continue to go about their business in the grim rough North Atlantic waters. Therefore, the

chief economic mainstay of normal times does not seem to be too severely affected by the ravages of the war. On the contrary, business in general is flourishing.

That fishing is the chief industry is quite obvious when one looks about and sniffs about in Iceland. The ubiquitous fish is on land as well as in the sea. Fish is prominent on menus, in shops, in bottles, in tins, on plates—in pastries and salads, on counters and racks and in barrels—everywhere, smoked, dried, oiled, shredded, or just plain rotten! Fish is a great fertilizer; and it is hard to see how, in the spring, any Icelander's fancy can turn to thoughts of love. Not with the evil-smelling stench of rotten fish heads on every field, or fish hung on drying racks and spread upon rocks, for no matter from what quarter the wind blows the air is permeated with the odor of fish in all stages of processing. This lasts for weeks—well into the summer—and it was a happy day for me when I could smell the new-mown hay instead of fish.

Women do most of the processing and packing of the fish, once it is brought in by the fleet of tiny fishing smacks. In the small fishing towns they work at the water's edge, and sort, salt and stack great quantities of fish in record-breaking time.

Seal and porpoise likewise abound along the Icelandic coasts. The seal supports a lively business.

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

Sealskin bags, gloves, slippers, belts, billfolds and seal trim are displayed in the windows of all the novelty shops. I was disappointed in the quality of the skin, which was rough and rather inferior. Furriers do not exhibit seal as much as silver fox. Innumerable silver-fox farms supply fine pelts which, before the American Occupation, were available at a nominal price. Since then the price has gone skyward; and I was advised not to consider making a purchase, for the pelts require considerable processing, which brings the total cost up to or beyond what would be paid for the same thing in the States.

It is not strange that these people are outstanding fishermen, for theirs is the blood of seafarers of ancient origin. Iceland's historical background is made colorful by the deeds and sagas of her earliest settlers, about whom there seem to be conflicting stories. Some claim that an order of Irish Culdees had inhabited the island long before it was discovered by the Vikings around 850 A.D., while others claim that there were no inhabitants before the Norwegian colonists. No matter; colonization was begun in 874 A.D. and from that time on there was a steady stream of immigration from Norway, where, in those days too, political conditions displeasing to many an independent fiery Viking led him to seek political freedom elsewhere. "Elsewhere" was the

little island that became "Island" (pr. "Ees-landt") and is known under the same spelling and pronunciation even today.

There is an undeniable strain of the Celt intermixed with the Norse blood, said to be the result of several visits to the coast of Ireland by these same hardy Vikings. Yet here again many contradictory stories are presented regarding the manner in which the two bloods became mixed. We can believe that the Vikings had taken a somewhat circuitous route from Norway to "Island" via Ireland, and had invited the Celts, or perhaps had coerced them, to join the northbound party as servants. Or we can believe that these carrot-bearded pirates established raiding parties on the coast of Ireland and in so doing fell victims to the charms of the colleens and carried them off to the land of the Midnight Sun. No matter how it was done, there remains to this day a strong suggestion of the Irish in the looks, manner, speech and humor of the Iceland.

In fact, some have given credit to Irish influence for the color, beauty and style of the Icelandic sagas. These sagas, preserved in the original for over a thousand years, are still being printed in great numbers, and every child in Iceland has read them thoroughly. "Saga," literally translated, means "written story," or writings of the heroic tales as recited by story-tellers in the days before writing was introduced. In those days, story-telling was the most

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

popular form of entertainment; an imaginative man with a gift for drama and oratory was in great demand at feasts and gatherings. The more gifted, the more he was called upon, and his oft-repeated recitations became so well remembered by his enraptured listeners that they, in turn, passed the stories on verbatim to their children. Many, many years later these same recitations were put into writing with faithful adherence to the original style and phrasing.

Despite her warlike origins Iceland remains neutral, if such a thing is possible today; yet she is overrun by soldiers whose very numbers, it has been feared, might jeopardize the traditions of independence that she has maintained for generations. Iceland's political history dates far back to an age when few peoples anywhere had the united political organization that this little island proudly maintained. The Althing (legislative assembly) is the oldest parliament in the world. The place of assembly was called Thingvetlir, or Thingvellir—"thing" means "to say." This was an outdoor meeting-place where volcanic rock formations and fissures formed natural "auditoriums," having excellent acoustical qualities for the many speeches that were given simultaneously during legislative sessions. The assemblies or meetings were well attended by all men; and perhaps their families accompanied them too, for these occasions were as festive as they were important.

On foot or on pony, they came and camped at Thingvetlir to "say," or to hear what the chieftains or speakers had to say, regarding the laws which governed their country. Their much-cherished political freedom was, however, gained and lost again and again, until in 1918 Iceland was once more made independent by means of a special treaty with Denmark.

There has been little or no change in the language for over a thousand years. It is the original Old Norse, and consequently it is the purest Scandinavian speech. Having heard our American soldiers struggle with the language (as did I), I came to the conclusion that it is not an easy tongue to master. For those versed in the Scandinavian languages or in German it is not too difficult a task; although Icelandic does not sound like German, or any other language for that matter, there are German and Icelandic words that are quite similar in spelling and meaning. It is a soft-spoken lilting language, which might be considered melodic were it not for a certain sibilance frequently recurrent in conversations. A few British and American soldiers have learned to speak fluently—particularly those who have gone steadily with a "stulkan" ("I" and "n" silent), or local girl. But most of us were limited to simple greetings, such as, "Gothan dag" (good day), "Bless" (good-bye), "Thakafirra" (thank you very much) and "Skillikki" (I don't understand). Every tongue

COUNTRY OF FROST AND FIRE

has its "okay," of course, and in Icelandic it is "alt-ee-ligh-yi."

To try to read Icelandic, however, is to become hopelessly fouled up with strange little letters that are not pronounced the way they look—and more often they do not even look pronounceable. I struggled and got as far as learning that a very fancy looking "p" was pronounced "th," and that an equally fancy "o," having what looked like crossed sabers above it, was actually a "d." Perhaps it would not have been difficult to learn, had we been obliged to depend on Icelandic in order to get around. However, it was not necessary for us to do so. English is taught as a compulsory language in the upper schools; and the Icelandic, like his Scandinavian cousins, really learns his foreign tongues.

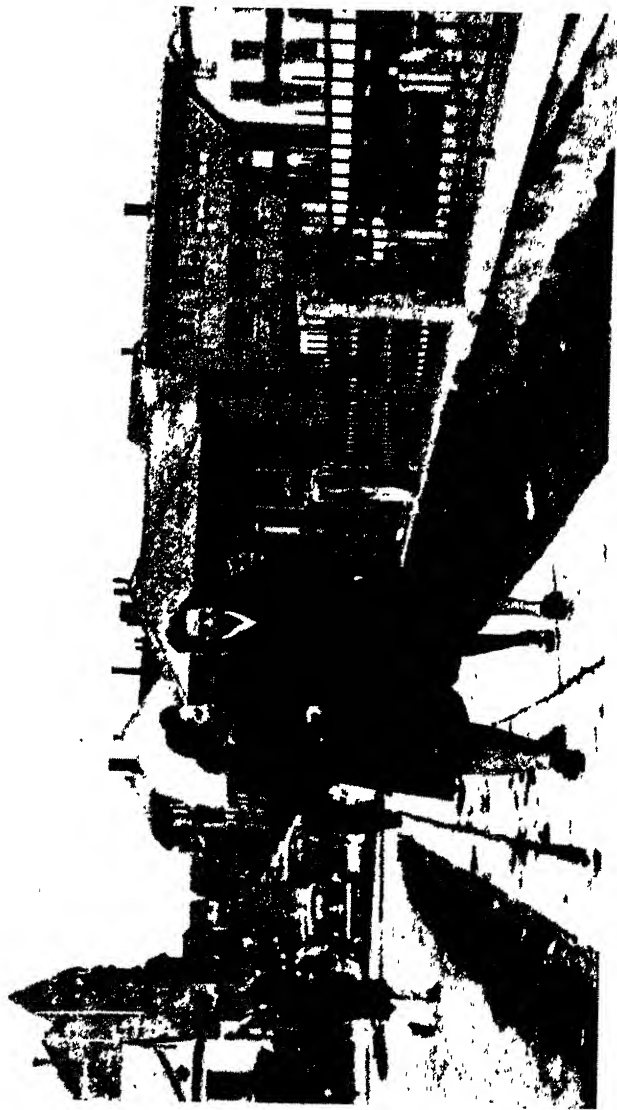
PEOPLE frequently ask me if I did not enjoy being in a land which has no insect life. I would perhaps enjoy that experience, but I have yet to see any region that has no bugs, beetles or flies. Iceland has its quota of insects, and most prominent is *Musca domestica*, which looks exactly like what it is—our common house fly. The resemblance goes no further than appearance, however. There is a decided difference in motion, disposition and intelligence. The Icelandic fly first of all is an out-and-out sluggard. The very first time I saw him, I thought that he had been sprayed with Flit and was just regaining con-

sciousness. I could hardly believe that I was becoming adept in the art of catching flies with my bare hand. Yet I caught them all, until in time it was no longer a sport. Their lazy drone as they slopped around never even rose to a buzz.

We had daddy longlegs, too. Through force of childhood superstition, I refrained from disposing of him; there was, I felt, enough rain without inviting more, and besides I liked these stilted insects. Young and old, they walked about our huts as though they were in the final stages of senility. Their walk suggested an aged rheumatic with a pair of canes, and in our duller moments I could not help but feel a sympathetic interest in their halting, groping progress.

Luxuriating in the absence of dogs are the many cats of Iceland, thick-coated and sleek. Every home has its "kissa," or kitty, which is regarded with tender affection and pride, for there are the mice to be disposed of in great numbers, as well as large evil-looking rats.

Aside from seagulls, terns, ducks and the usual assortment of birds found near any sea coast, I saw little or no bird life. Of great interest, however, were the eider ducks, which supply the eider market with the down from their breasts. Collecting this staple is a long-drawn-out procedure of taking a small amount of the down that lines the nest when the eider duck is not looking. When the poor bird re-



"NAY-EE, NAY-FEE"

"It is the matter of getting to know them that has been such a problem for our troops."

turns to the nest, she notes the loss and probably swears to her mate that she was sure she had lined the nest completely and had left no "holidays." The drake may or may not have something to say about her oversight, but he does nothing to make good on it. She goes to work to replace the loss, and for two days all is well.

On the third day another collection is made, and not only the down but an egg is filched this time. Mr. and Mrs. Eider return from their foraging trip, she resumes her sedentary labors, and upon getting herself settled down to the business she has a feeling that something is wrong, out of place or missing. It is pretty much of a job to get her feathers all arranged so that each egg gets sufficient warmth—she would hate to get up and have to go through the complicated business all over again. Yet her female intuition tells her that she will have to do so. Imagine her feelings when she counts the eggs and there are only four instead of five! Panic grips her. Only with a supreme effort is she able to control herself and laboriously make a second count. She makes a third and fourth count, and although she never gets the same total, she never gets the desired count of five. At about this point of the inventory she stumbles across the down theft, and her silent dismay finds voice in a shrill hysterical squall.

Urged by mere curiosity, her better half lumbers up to the nest. She appeals to him to verify the fact

that she had replaced the down three days before. He does so. She asks him to confirm the fact that she had laid *five* eggs and that the *fifth* one was laid just before they went out for something to eat. He obligingly confirms this. She asks him to look into the nest and please to count the eggs. He makes a great pretence of counting but his arithmetic is as sadly lacking as hers. He counts twice, gets four and then three, and finally gives up. He suggests that she lay another egg and replace the down from her breast. As he walks away, he is heard to mutter that it is not up to the drake to run the nursery. . . . Poor Mrs. Eider is left to solve her own problems, and again and again she is forced to replenish the down and eggs. She becomes philosophical and wisely accepts it as her cross to bear. That is why eider down is so expensive.

5

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

IN WASHINGTON we had enjoyed visions of large recreation houses already built and waiting for us to step into with a full-fledged program of recreation. Such a vision in no way matched reality; yet it remained a dream, and its immediate materialization was always being eagerly anticipated. I do not believe that any one of us realized that for five or six months our program was to consist of Camp work.

As for myself, I fondly cherished a dream of a mobile show-unit which was to travel from camp to camp. When the opportunity came to do camp programs on an all-time basis, I was delighted. In a way, this work brought me a step closer to my goal. While circumstances never did permit more than that one step, I lived in constant hopes that we could organize talent from the troops and take these performers around to the various camps. This, of course, is what Special Service is now doing, but until this organization came into existence a critical shortage of man power did not permit the talented soldiers the necessary time in which to prepare for the shows.

Rehearsals all had to be wedged in between duties, and the few shows that I did manage to take to the camps were worked out just by sheer luck. Many a last-minute cancellation of a turn meant that I had to go to a camp with a "program" instead of a show.

A "program" is actually a collection of songs and games with which a worker "entertains" the men. The programs depend largely upon group participation, whereby the men are mainly called upon to entertain themselves.

We soon learned that it was necessary to develop a variety of programs, in order to present something suited to every type of group. This was accomplished with two main factors kept in mind at all times: the number of men in a group, and the kind of entertainment that would be best appreciated by them as a whole. (I.Q.s vary according to the character of the organization.) Three hundred men, say, cannot be expected to enjoy a game of charades, an entertainment admirably suited to a small group of twenty or thirty. Nor could we expect a group of higher-than-average mentality to enjoy a very simple quiz program.

Therefore, whenever it was possible, we tried to determine beforehand the number of men who would be present at the scheduled camp. Sometimes we would be told that there would be twenty or thirty men. Having prepared our program for this number, we would find upon arrival well over a

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

hundred soldiers instead of a score. Naturally this called for a hasty revamping of our planned program. In many instances, groups of men would be shifted to new camps that we had not yet visited; and we, unaware of this transfer, would discover at the very last minute that we had given this same group the identical program not a month before.

Pending my transfer from Hospital to Camp, I had on several occasions accompanied the other workers on their rounds. My first opportunity to "learn by observation" came through a last-minute change in the schedule which meant that Doris Thain would have to go to the camp alone. Because two or more workers gave an extra lift to a program, Doris welcomed me when I volunteered to go along with her. We were called for by a chaplain and driven to a lonely little outpost. There we were greeted by the youthful Lieutenant who was the only commissioned officer in the entire camp. Such was its size. There was no doubting the interest he had in his men's morale. By staggering their duty shifts, he had arranged it so that they could all attend a portion of the program. He told us that they had been stationed there for many months. "These boys haven't had much fun since they left the States. They get a pass to go to town now and then, but there isn't much for them to do when they get there, so most of them prefer to stay in camp."

We entered a hut, smaller than we had ever seen.

Rough tables and benches indicated that this was the mess hut. A small odd-shaped stove crackled away merrily. "This is an old British camp, you know," explained the Lieutenant. "We haven't been able to get the material for a recreation hut . . . that is why we use this mess hut. Of course, it's awfully small . . . just big enough for a ping-pong table . . . but that is about all the recreation material we've been able to get." He sighed wearily and then his face brightened. "But say, you don't know how much these boys will appreciate hearing an American woman's voice again!"

I watched the men as they entered the hut. They were even younger than their Lieutenant. And very shy. It was apparent that they did not know just how to take us. . . . Were we really American women? Were we really there to entertain *them*? They sidled toward the wall and seated themselves as far from us as possible. Good heavens, I thought, what can be done with a bunch of bashful soldiers? Is that what Iceland does to them? I had never seen anything like this before—a shy audience! In no time, however, Doris had them all grouped about us and singing as though they had known us all their lives. I learned that night that, with groups of soldiers who had never seen us before, it was necessary to break the ice and get acquainted with them. Once you have done so, there is a complete turn-about; before that evening was over, those boys were entertaining us

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

with songs, dances and little parlor tricks. They even served us coffee and doughnuts. When we left them it did not seem possible that only two and a half hours ago we had been total strangers.

That first camp program made me realize how much of the experience acquired at Fort Belvoir would have to be forgotten. Where patients, who already knew me, had come to me in a mood for singing, games and entertainment, the situation was now reversed. I was going to the men with these diversions and, whether or not they were in the mood, it was up to me to see that they all had a good time. Perhaps this does not sound too difficult to accomplish. As a matter of fact, it was comparatively simple once the men got to know us; but for the first six months or so the majority of our programs were presented to men who had never before seen us. This led to the practice of observing the men as they entered the hut, to ascertain, if possible, their mood, and plan the finer points of presentation accordingly.

The men were just as careful in studying us, too. As a rule, many selected seats having vantage points that allowed them to see all without being seen themselves. This part of an audience I came to term the "gotta show me" element. As they settled down on the hard benches it was obvious that this element had come to watch . . . and nothing more. No, sir! I soon learned why soldiers greet these programs with a "negative" attitude: perhaps they have been

ordered to attend, or else come straggling in because they are bored and there is nothing else to do. At first I was a little scared by these "unbelievers"—particularly if they were in the majority—but after a few experiences I began to understand soldier audiences; and of course one cannot fear what one understands.

At one camp where Ethel Rea and I were to put on a program, we found the mess hut packed to capacity with men we had never seen before. Their faces actually shone with anticipation. This, we thought, is a wonderful audience; no need to break the ice here. Why couldn't all camps have such a nice set-up? A soldier approached me: "Hello, Gadget, how are you?" I was glad to see this boy among all those strangers. He had been a patient when I was hospital worker, and he had just returned to his camp. "Want to know something funny?" he asked. "Top-kick came running into our quarters just before you got here and told the boys to get over to the mess hut as fast as they could because a couple of chorus girls were coming to put on a show for us!" I howled. I couldn't help it. It struck me funny in spite of the fact that the men were going to be terribly disappointed. I ran over and caught Ethel as she was about to start the program, and whispered the explanation for the large and enthusiastic audience. This knowledge gave Ethel the opportunity to turn to good advantage an otherwise unfortunate situation.

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

"Boys," she addressed the gathering, "it seems that Jane and I have quite an imaginative press agent in this camp! Of course by now you can see that we are *not* chorus girls—and we are both terribly sorry to disappoint you like this. However, we're here to give you a good time and first of all we would like to meet the gentleman who misinformed you boys." She paused and the men raised a joyous cry: "Sergeant Jones—that's him over there—stand up, Sergeant, come on, stand up." The sergeant, short, chubby, stands up grinning from ear to ear. "Come right up, Sergeant Jones, we want to meet you." "Go on up to the front, Sergeant," echo the men. It is obvious that the men like this noncom, who has a very definite twinkle in his eye. "Sergeant, you are undoubtedly a man who has a good sense of humor and tremendous imagination. We are led to believe that you have a good many talents!" "Make him sing . . . he can sing. C'mon, Sarge, you know you can!"

The men whistled and stamped their feet. Jones stepped forward, and we knew by the sudden hush that this man could really sing. Furthermore, he sang the kind of songs that soldiers like to hear other soldiers sing: sentimental ballads. When the applause had died down, Jones obliged with a lively encore along the lines of "She said she wasn't hungry but this is what she ate"; and by now he had a guitar and harmonica accompaniment. At the end of the

song the two-piece orchestra took over and elaborated on the theme with embellishments, and Sergeant Jones whispered to us: "Get Lieutenant Smith to play his fiddle . . . the men like to hear him play." The men were delighted when the officer appeared before them with his violin. It interested me to observe how much men enjoy having their officers "get up and do something entertaining." No matter how good or bad the effort, the men seem to appreciate it tremendously.

Before the end of that particular program everybody had participated in the fun, either by showing off with a stunt or two, or simply by joining in the group singing. It had been a highly successful program, especially considering the fact that the men had expected entertainment of an entirely different nature. Chorus girls! What next?

MANY people ask, "What does one have to do, or have, to be a recreation worker?" Well, of course a sincere interest in "just people" is the main thing; but added to this are the variable qualities—the individual temperament, ability, imagination, training and experience. All these intangibles have much to do with the development of a recreation worker. No two people work exactly alike as, naturally, no two people are alike in respect of training and temperament. Therefore it was without fear of duplication or imitation that we observed the methods of our

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

associates and interwove borrowed ideas into our own pattern of work. An interchange of ideas and suggestions was encouraged at our staff meetings, and constructive criticism was welcomed if it meant that our own individual programs could be added to or improved.

Getting advance information about the men in a new group was not always so easy and propitious as the "chorus girl incident." There was, unfortunately, little or no time in which to become thoroughly acquainted with the soldier as an individual. One of the most reliable methods of sounding out as well as warming up the men was community singing, which started off all our programs. During the singing we had a good opportunity to judge whether or not the program could be developed along musical lines, and could spot the talented singers. However, in passing out the song sheets it is inevitable that ninety per cent of the men will say: "Ah cain't sing a note, ma'am." Give the man the song sheet anyway—and before the evening is over he'll be doing all right for a guy who couldn't sing a note! He'll even swipe the song sheet and learn every song by heart.

Those who took our song sheets could never quite be made to realize that they were making off with the life-blood of our program. We in turn never quite had the heart to be touchy about it because we knew that the purloined sheet would be passed

around the entire camp—that on our next visit they'd probably all be able to sing the songs clear through. Therefore our song sheets were a constant source of trouble. First of all the songs had to be collected and typed for mimeographing. Mimeograph paper was as scarce as hens' teeth—we were lucky to get as much as two hundred sheets at a time. Once we had the paper, we went scurrying around for a mimeograph machine. Sometimes we tracked one down in the Army, sometimes the Navy obliged us. When all these little problems had been solved the completed sheets were divided four ways, with the warning that fifty sheets would have to last us three weeks if not longer. To make fifty sheets last for three weeks was an art; it meant that in that time a worker would have gone to eighteen camps, and that at each there would be at least two sheets "borrowed," until, at the end of the third week, she had perhaps only fourteen left to distribute among a group of over a hundred men. And then, if we were not lucky enough to obtain more paper . . . we had to go right on and sing without them.

Whenever fresh song sheets were made up, new numbers were added and less popular ones were discarded. However, they generally ran the gamut of sentiment with "Carry Me Back to Ol' Virginny," "Down by the Old Mill Stream," "Be Honest with Me" and "Shine on, Harvest Moon." Of course we included all the current song hits and Army tunes.

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

Favorites like "You Are My Sunshine" were sung thousands and thousands of times. Many of the songs also provided the men with much secret amusement. Typical was the last verse of "Red River Valley," in which the parting lover is chided:

From this valley they say you are going,
When you go, may your darlin' go, too?
Would you leave her behind unprotected
When she loves no other but you?

The first tune to start the singing was "Smiles," and this was followed by a parody to the same tune: "There are smiles from Indiana, There are smiles from Idaho, There are smiles from Maine to California," and so on. The final line consisted of "But the smiles that come from — Are the smiles that I love the best!" The blank was to be filled in by the soldiers, who were told that every man was to shout his home state's name. They gladly SHOUTED and what followed was bedlam as the men argued good-naturedly among themselves the merits of their own states. This song was called "The Ice Breaker," for by the time we were ready to go on with the program all shyness and reserve had melted away during the uproar.

Speaking of states: I had never before been made to feel the importance of a state, one's *home* state, until I went to Iceland. The first question on everybody's lips was, "Where are you from?" If you were

from Alabama, you were an all-right kid as far as the Alabamans were concerned. If you came from Georgia the Georgians supported you a hundred per cent. Having rolled about, I innocently replied, "Oh, here and there." That was the wrong answer. "Oh, no, you're just kidding. Where are you from—California? New York? Chicago? Boston? You gotta be from somewhere!" Indeed I did have to come from somewhere. I could see that I could never be believed in anything if I did not claim to have my roots down deep in some part of America. Well, I professed to be a Yankee; and although that was a handicap among these Southerners, I was forgiven in view of the fact that I had come from "somewhere particular."

Most of the men were from the South. I joked with them about it, saying I hoped they would not ostracize me; and at one particular camp with an all-Confederate population I "regretfully" announced that I was a "Damyankee . . . all one word." This brought a laugh from the men, above which there rose a howl, "I'm from New Hampshire!" A soldier ran up from the audience, and I swear there were tears in his eyes when he told me it was like seeing a member of his own family to see me, a total stranger. "Gosh, it's good to be able to talk to someone in your own language again," he said. "These fellers kid the pants off me the way I talk and I don't

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

even try to talk with 'em any more. . . . Besides they're still fightin' the Civil War!"

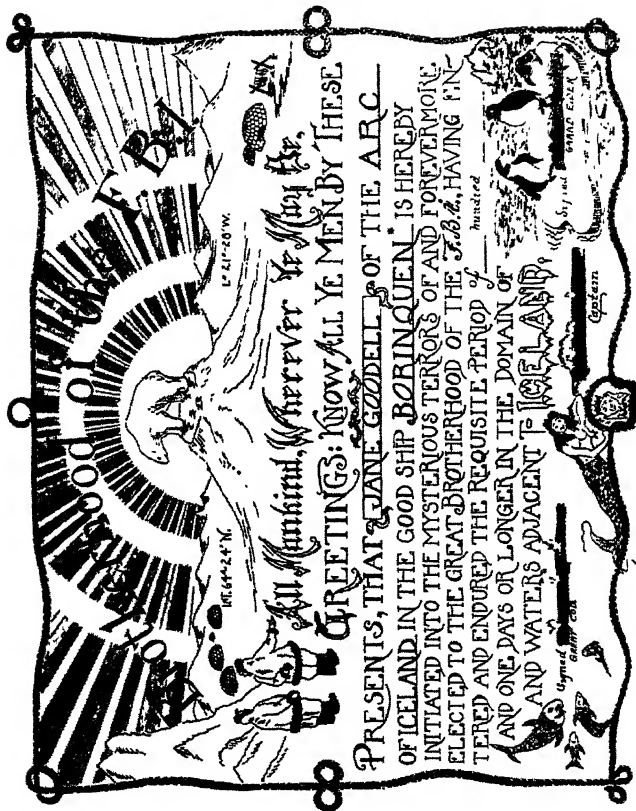
When a soldier is on foreign soil his home state becomes *the* paradise spot in America. He will argue loudly and at great length on the subject. One Icelandic gentleman, overhearing a group of soldiers enjoying this kind of dispute, jokingly made the comment that one would almost visualize America as divided up into little countries that were all foreign to each other in speech, thought and action.

Not only in speech, but in singing as well, there was a difference. Only through a very painful experience did I learn this; I tried to lead eighty-five hill billies in a brisk if not swingy tempo. What I suffered was defeat, embarrassment and utter exhaustion. Be it "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," "Amapola," "Yours," or "Daddy," the hill billy takes these songs—any song—and breathes into each note a profound sadness bordering on the funereal. He lengthens short rests and cuts the long rests short. Furthermore, he knows what he is doing and has got his timing down to a system that is elusive and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. The layman becomes side-tracked if he does not catch on to this style.

The first time, I was silly enough to think that I could lead the boys according to my ideas of rhythm. I persisted (with what I like to think was courage)

in this effort with a grim determination to finish what I had started. But somewhere I got hopelessly fouled up in one of those unpredictable pauses, and I came out ahead by at least two measures. Perhaps I was leading too fast, I thought. I persevered, and during the next song I slowed down a bit and came out a good three measures behind everybody else. The men waited courteously for me to finish and then called out another number. Off we went again, and this time I let them go it without benefit of leadership. After a while I learned their way, and when I did I realized that it was a sacrilege to trifle with the hill-billy way of singing. You just sing their way—or else!

In all group singing, naturally, there had to be leadership, but it was always most difficult to lead with results completely satisfactory to the leader. In most cases it was a little distressing for anyone with a fairly strong appreciation of music. The first difficulty lay in the fact that we rarely had instrumental accompaniment. That meant that the leader was obliged to start the song in the correct key for male voices. Not only that—she had to sing the song through in that key. This was a strain on us. If we failed to start off in the right key, the results were far from harmonious. The men either rumbled along at ten vibrations per minute or screeched like peanut whistles. Moreover, when we did have accompaniment—perhaps a couple of guitars, a harmonica



An Annihil. Wherever Ye May Be.

GREETINGS: KNOW ALL YE MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, THAT JANE GODELL OF THE A.R.C. OF ICELAND IN THE GOOD SHIP BORINQUEN IS HEREBY INITIATED INTO THE MYSTERIOUS TERRORS OF AND FOREVERMORE ELECTED TO THE GREAT BROTHERHOOD OF THE J.B.B. HAVING ENTERED AND ENDURED THE REQUISITE PERIOD OF — hundred AND ONE DAYS OR LONGER IN THE DOMAIN OF — AND WATERS ADJACENT TO ICELAND.

Signed J. B. B.
Signed J. B. B.
Signed J. B. B.

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

or a mandolin—we were dismayed to find that maybe the players were limited as to the number of keys, or perhaps they did not have a sense of rhythm, in which case we found it best not to rely upon them for support. Once in a blue moon, though, we ran across real musicians who could play every song ever written, and play it in any key and rhythm known to man. They were heaven-sent.

Occasionally, too, the men got "warmed up" to hysterical pitch. Everybody would want to talk, wise-crack and show off at the same time. This boisterous display never disturbed us—it was good to let them get it out of their systems for a few minutes. Sometimes, of course, a top-kick would take it upon himself to order them to quiet down, but we did not quite care for this practice; we felt that the men should enjoy themselves without any military authority in evidence. We learned instead to employ two magic words with an immediate subduing effect: "At ease!" This surprised them into silence, for it was the order they shouted at each other when their own bull sessions grew too noisy. I think the sudden hush that greeted us was largely owing to their curiosity to hear what we might say next in their own language.

The soldiers' vocabulary teems, as in other wars, with fit words and pat phrases of their own invention. Not always flattering, yet descriptive, were nicknames bestowed upon the Icelandic natives:

"Sheepskins," "Fish Heads" and "Codheads" were very popular. In constant use were "goldbrick" (loaf), "chowhound" (gourmand), "sidearms" (sugar and cream), "dog robber" (officer's orderly), "sugar report" (love letter). To worry or to await an important development was to "sweat it out." The boys were always sweating out something—the chowline, sugar reports, promotions. For the more delicate art of "making" a girl, the soldier might "snow her under" with charm and chatter. To "wolf"—well, that was pretty strong snowing! If a man was worried, angered or in despair over something, he was said to be "blowing his top." With this wealth of jargon we were able to produce a quiz on army slang which we added to our program, for the benefit of the newly arrived men—better known as "yardbirds."

While we knew that the men enjoyed our programs and always wanted us to "come back soon," I never really felt satisfied that I was doing the best for them. Perhaps we all felt that way, for we were always on the search for new program material and new ideas, though not so much because uncertainties required ever-changing flexible programs as through our desire to give them the best in entertainment. My idea of giving the best was to give them shows. At almost all the camps our visits were heralded by the rumor, "Red Cross is going to put on a show for us." And finally the day did arrive when I was able

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

to take a real show to several camps—but not, I might add, without considerable preparation. The talent for this show all came from one camp, where the Morale Officer, a young lieutenant, was not only sympathetic but went out of his way to clear each man and arrange for the necessary transportation. Without his help we would have been stymied completely. Little was required of me, beyond supplying the costumes and moral support, for these boys had talent, and they worked out their individual acts to an almost professional degree.

The night of the opening was accompanied by the customary worries, last-minute changes and confusion. When the show was over, though, the boys knew that it had been a success. A soldier audience is perhaps the most honest and outspoken of all. If a show is good they'll applaud at every turn—and if it bears a bad odor they'll let you know long before the finale. Throughout the entire show our cast received chuckles, guffaws and roars for their efforts.

Only one incident came up to worry us. We had in our "wardrobe" a jitterbug costume, complete with blouse, short skirt, appropriate padding and a fancy blond wig (made from rope), all turned out by Betty Clark. This costume had seen considerable service and had never failed to distinguish itself as a laugh producer. We had just the man for it, a corporal, famed as a ballroom dancer, who could unbend and turn out a very effective bit of jitterbugging

when he felt so inclined. The trouble was, when his buddies asked him to team up with another boy and take the part of the girl, his esthetic sense was outraged. They pleaded with him. No. They threatened him. The answer was still no. To skip this act meant to lose a lot of laughs. I did not want to appeal to the corporal in such a way as to make him feel like a skunk if he refused, yet neither did I want him to do it unless he wanted to. There was but one alternative, and when we met I resorted to it, though not with too much confidence.

"The boys tell me that you do not wish to take the jitterbug act, Corporal, but I am going to ask you to do me a favor." He started to squirm about uncomfortably, so I hastened to assure him: "Oh, I know how you feel about it—I agree with you that it might seem a little silly to wear a costume like that and I'm not even asking you to do it. I just want you to find another boy who can do it and do it well, because it means a lot of fun for the audience." I described the act as the others had done it, the successes they had enjoyed, and concluded with: "I want to make this the best performance ever, so I'll leave it up to you to be the judge. You select the man who can do it." On the eve of the show a soldier called for the costume. "Who's going to wear it?" I asked. "Corporal Sohmer has been rehearsin' the lady's part for three days," he replied. "Couldn't find anybody who dances better'n himself!"

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

FOLLOWING this successful première, and greatly encouraged by it, the cast set about to add here and there and make improvements. In the course of this analysis it was suggested that maybe some of our girls would take part in the show. I was willing—but where to begin? Each act was carefully studied for the proposed injection of femininity, but each required too much rehearsal and there was not much time for that. There was, however, an act which we could and did include in this show. Helen Lee, Cam and I had originally worked up this skit more for our own amusement than anything else. Hitherto it had been reserved for the members of our own group, but Mary thought the boys would like it. Would we, she asked, do our act in a show that she was planning? Greatly flattered, we said yes.

The act had been conceived after a long period of oft-repeated denials that we were nurses. "When I'm sick and wounded, will you be my nurse?" "Nurse, I got a pain in my stummick—what can I take for it?" "Say, my wife writes that she's got trouble with her back, what'll I tell her to do about it?" Yes, these were some of the questions fired at us. But when many soldiers began to call us "Angels of Mercy," well . . . that was a bit thick. But soon the appellation began to strike us funny because, in a way, it was not too far removed from the truth. Indeed, there were many situations which required of us the cardinal virtues and exemplary actions of

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

those celestial spirits! The humor of it produced words, music and action which, with a few changes here and there, were then presented before the soldier audience.

We made our debut at The Missouri Hogpen. The opening curtain revealed three "Angels," clad in uniforms, heavy oversized boots, wings, and long black stockings, striding on to the stage in three-quarter time. Attached to long wires we carried halos, which we waved about overhead as we drew up to the front of the stage. With a preliminary one-kick, two-kick, three-kick, we regarded our audience seriously (and with mock severity if they laughed).

Sa-weet lit-tul an-gels of mer-cy are we,
That is what you call us,
Though you had to haul us
O-ver the sea
Here to spread joys 'mong the boys—and such things.
How could we have flown?
We do not ev-en own
Wah-haw-ter wings!

Always a few soldiers in the audience did not know whether to laugh or not, and so, when we sang the line "Here to spread joys," we aimed oranges and cigarettes at them. Maybe we were too subtle, or perhaps they were too polite to laugh at what they thought might possibly be a serious effort. However, when we turned to show them the fancy wings

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

pinned to the back of our collars, they laughed and settled down to enjoy the rest of the performance.

We made a start on the old Lean-in' Lee,
Ruba-duba-dub—
What a rocky tub,
It nev-ver made sea!
Then we were switched to the Hey-wood, and THEN
Found it was a gag,
So we packed our bag
And got off again!

This was appreciated, for many of the men had gone through the same experiences with us. We executed a few bovine kicks until the laughter died down, and then—

I: Once more be-hind the Bo-rin-queen's fair prow
Though the meals were delicious
Still I fed the fishes
ALL of my CHOW!

("Haw, haw haw, I'll bet," cried the audience.)

CAM: I a poor landlubber
Found my legs were rubber
I was no wow!

(Helen Lee and I pinched her legs, saying, "She doesn't know about rubber priority!")

HELEN LEE: I lay in my bed
And wished that I were dead
If God would allow!

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

(“Man-oh-man, ain’t that the truth!” from the audience.)

ALL: “Are we glad to be here?
And *how!* yow!”

By this time we knew we “had” our audience, and as Mary, who accompanied us on the piano, said, we were “drunk with power.” We filled our lungs for the last verse of the first act. It was a tongue-twisting climax, summing up the moral of our story with this Parthian shot:

Nev-ver be-fore were much mir-acles seen!
On-ly o-ver night
Each gal in her own right
Becomes a fair queen.
We re-a-lize at home this could not be,
So we will not shirk
For we are here to work.
And bear this well in mind:
We keep ourselves in line,
Though beautiful
Remaining dutiful,
Such an-gels are we!

When the curtain went down at the end of this act we were always rewarded with shouts of “*More!* We want *more!*” The men whistled and stamped their feet. In response to this request we lumbered out after we had made certain additions to our costumes. The men knew that we had not overexag-

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

gerated when we appeared in raincoats, gas masks and helmets.

Gas masks and hel-mets and ha-los and wings—
Loaded down we're dizzy,
Trying to keep busy
In the darn things.
Each meal we eat is the gour-mand's dee-light,
In the morning Spam—
Again at noon it's Spam—
And more Spam at night!

Inevitably at this point all three of us went up on our next line. I glared at Helen Lee and Cam, and they glared right back at me. The lines failed to come. Although this loss of memory was not intentional, we were never embarrassed by it for the men were still laughing about the diet of Spam by the time one of us recalled that—

It nev-ver rains here—it just sim-ply pours.
We can't help observing
That it's most un-nerving
When the wind roars,
But we'll ad-mit it's a won-der-ful sight
Watching huts and people
And an old church steeple
Soaring in flight!

Such musical comments about the country we occupied were pertinent, timely and quite truthful.

ALL: And we are learn-ing the Ice-land-ic way:
I: Always pull a boner

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

Figuring the kronur

That I must pay.

CAM: Natives think I'm crazy,
With their tongue I'm hazy
In what I say.

HELEN LEE: Do not let me lose
The teeth that I can use,
I fervently pray.

ALL: And we've learned to say
Alt-ee-ligh-yi *
And (in a firm but coy manner) NAY-ee!

That was our contribution to the show. Its success encouraged me to plan bigger and better skits. Helen Lee and Cam, losing every vestige of stage fright, had become seasoned performers by the time we were requested to take part in the first big troop show to be given on the island. Sponsored by Special Service, it was to tour the island for six or eight weeks. We girls were thrilled by the thought of being a part of this "Command Performance," as it was to be called. Unfortunately, at the last moment we could not be spared, for there were not even enough of us to meet the increasing demands for more camp programs.

"Command Performance" went on without us, and was a tremendous success. However, there were so many other important things to be done, and so few to do them, that there was no time to linger grieving over any disappointments. For my own part, the

* "Alt i lagi"—Everything is all right.

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

immediate problem was that now I had to start looking for a new show without realizing that such efforts could not possibly bear fruit: all the talent on the island had been absorbed by "Command Performance."

But, before I had quite had time to discover this, I was suddenly off on another course. The Signal Corps had, of their own volition, suggested that a film be made of American Red Cross activities in Iceland. They volunteered to do the shooting if we could arrange the scenes and narration with the proper continuity. As a member of the ARC Public Relations Committee (in Iceland), I not only thought we could supply the script but that indeed we should, under any circumstances. Better than reams of workers' cut-and-dried reports (which probably got no further than dusty office files) would be a film, made to enlighten the home front as to the exact nature of our work.

It was not that this vast organization required commercial advertising, for it is known the world over; but there are many ramifications to the Red Cross that few people seem to realize. A widely displayed poster of a madonna-like woman with a white cap or veil and the accompanying statement, "Still the Greatest Mother," has led many to believe that all who wear the Red Cross insignia are nurses, or at least ambulance drivers. Radio, newspapers and other publications cast us as nurses with maddening

persistence. It was as though they could not bear to destroy the popular illusion that we were somehow glamorously connected with actual bloodshed. But worse yet were the letters from friends and relatives who seemed to be under the impression that all we had to do was flit about as ineffably sweet creatures, basking in the warm and adoring glances of a thousand male eyes! Even they had but a vague idea of what we were doing in Iceland.

Such flagrant misinterpretations of our work irritated yet inspired me to cram all our activities into twelve minutes of film. Even at that I did not include the myriad duties that took up most of our spare moments between programs. Therefore, the film ran the gamut of our services that were thought to be more tangible, newsworthy and enlightening, but not by any means more important than the infinitesimal duties that only gained importance through endless repetition.

It was not without a sigh of relief from the Signal Corps that the final scene was shot. Outdoor shooting had been subject to the whims of the weather, and indoor shooting was possible only when a capricious generator gave sufficient current for the lighting. For the tall sergeant who did most of the work it was "blind shooting," because the films could not be developed in Iceland; so it was not without great care, concern and crossed fingers that each shot was taken. We in Red Cross breathed a sigh of

MEMBERS OF THE "FBI"

relief, too. Now, we thought, can there be any doubt as to what we are doing? Even if the film could not be used as a newsreel subject, surely it would be widely shown, thus acquainting the people with this new and fast-growing American Red Cross endeavor.

SEVERAL months passed, and a letter from the War Department (Public Relations) to Signal Corps was received: the entire film was judged excellent. Beyond that, nothing more was ever heard of it. . . . Although it would be of tremendous value in promotion and training, the missing film never has come to light.

As a sort of compensation, perhaps, it now was pointed out to us that at least we had earned a species of local distinction: overnight we had become members in good standing of the "FBI." This organization originated in the Navy; and we had qualified for membership by passing more than one hundred and one days on the island. After that much time, one became a "Forgotten Bastard of Iceland." Naturally, the initials "FBI" were given a canine slant when the female chapter was formed.

6

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

I HAD anticipated a lost feeling upon completion of the filming, but right on its heels came another job. The Icelandic fathers offered us the use of six rooms in the Reykjavik schoolhouse. Heretofore the school had not been considered as a possible Temporary Center. Since no one, it seemed, had even thought of it, no misty rumors surrounded its availability. Therefore this unexpected generosity came like a bolt out of the blue. Vacation had begun, the building was ready for immediate occupancy, and so we lost no time in accepting the offer with heartfelt gratitude.

Our sense of values had changed considerably in five months; the schoolhouse was a far cry from our original concepts of centralized recreation, but where we might have scorned it then we now looked upon it as too good to be true. Here was space—valuable hard-to-get-space! All six rooms were of the same size, not much more than 20 x 20 feet. However, we were utterly delighted with their spaciousness. Like railroad compartments, one room opened on to the

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

next, but it was a palace to us. There was also a gratifying squareness to the rooms; one could tell where the wall ended and the ceiling began. In short, it was a release from the claustrophobic closeness of semi-round huts. Even the soldiers themselves commented on the fact that a good square room was like being home again.

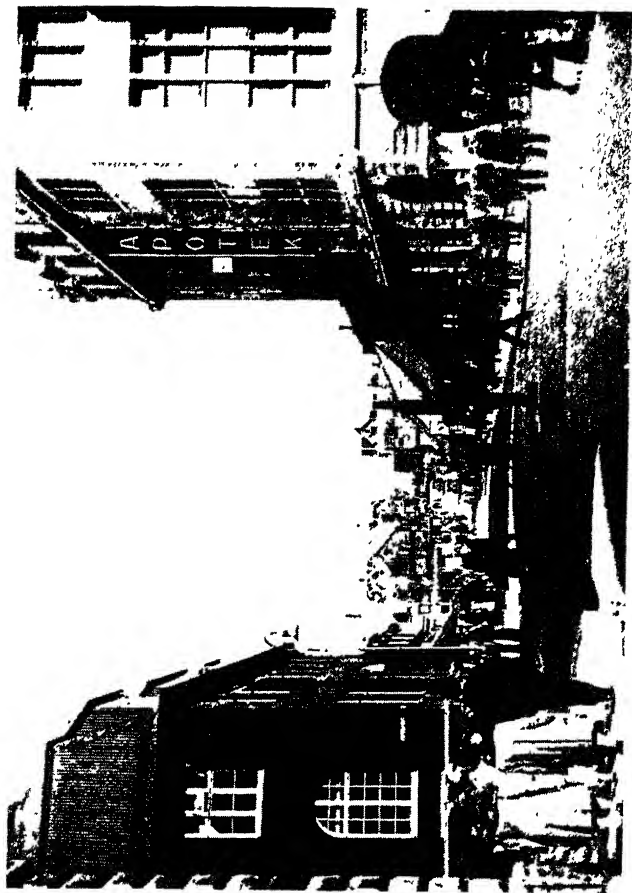
Now that we had the space, we had nothing to put in it. The \$230,000 worth of radios, ping-pong and pool tables, desks, chairs, and miscellaneous things which had been sent up by ARC had already been distributed to the camps. Not a stick of furniture or even a ping-pong ball remained in our storehouse. How it ever came about that, in two weeks, all six rooms were completely furnished, was thought to be nothing less than a miracle. Mary Dolliver, now in charge of the Center, spent many days looking for rugs and comfortable chairs. They were eventually unearthed, but at exorbitant prices, for they were the only available rugs and chairs in all Reykjavik (if not in all Iceland). Because it is a policy in the Army not to ask where a thing comes from (you rarely get a truthful answer if you do), I never did learn how the two ping-pong and two pool tables were obtained. I strongly suspect that the Recreation Director, Frank Hagan, must have done some mighty hard talking that left several officers' clubs without recreation equipment at just about that time.

Shortly before the opening day I was assigned to

the Center as Mary's assistant, and that good news, too, was hard for me to believe. It meant no more camp programs; but I welcomed the change, as it promised to be interesting and instructive under Mary's tutelage.

Not two hours after the Center had been "opened for business," Mary and I realized that our six rooms were much too small to accommodate the hordes of men who streamed in and out in an endless procession. From one o'clock that noon until ten-thirty that night, soldiers, sailors and marines practically stood in line for a chance to play pool and ping-pong. They crowded around Mary while she played the piano, and when the refreshments arrived I was kept busy for the rest of the afternoon serving Coca-Cola and Icelandic pastry.

Clearly, these men had not seen anything like this since leaving the States. They went from room to room, looking at the rugs, pictures, curtains and colorful maps that added so much to the homelike atmosphere. They fingered the books and magazines and tried the overstuffed chairs . . . the first comfortable chairs they had sat in for many months. They appeared to be in a pleasant daze—and perhaps they were, for this Center was as much their dream as it had been ours. To have it materialize after so many months was too good to be true. A wave of skepticism seemed to sweep over them; before the day's end, hardly one of them believed that it was



REYKJAVIK

"A little too modern to be considered quaint."

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

to be their place until school opened again in September. Such pessimism led many to say: "It's too good for the enlisted soldiers," or, "Just you wait, the officers will want to move in, too." Such manifest incredulity amounted to an almost childish resentment—and yet there was a reason for it.

Until June 16, 1942, at which time the Center opened, there had been no place in Reykjavik reserved for American soldiers where they could find wholesome relaxation under favorable social conditions. True, there were motion picture theaters, small restaurants, an indoor swimming pool and a gymnasium, but all were patronized in such great numbers by civilians and British soldiers that our men quite often turned away from these diversions—but had nothing to turn to. They were allowed to go to the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Airforce Institution) only in the company of a British soldier, and to the British-run Salvation Army Headquarters on the same terms. There was a café where a soldier could dance and drink one-half of one per cent beer (the Icelanders really enforce their prohibition laws). But in time this place had become overrun with the sea-going element, and the ensuing brawls soon imparted to the tiny café the atmosphere of a waterfront gin mill.

And so there was no alternative but to wander in and out the narrow streets of the city in search of a place that was not crowded. When a soldier in a far-

away camp obtained his rare pass to Reykjavik, he had a hard time trying to have any fun. Many of them, having gone to town once, felt that it was not worth another visit. Camp was preferable to a day spent in wandering about the crowded streets that offered no refuge against the cold and the driving rain. Moreover, the girls were not at all friendly with this soldier whom they had not seen before. They had not seen him at the dances. Because they had their own soldier boy friends, they were suspicious of this stranger; and so they looked at him coldly when he tried to strike up a conversation with them. "Skillikki," they hissed at him, although they knew perfectly well what he was talking about. "Skillikki," they said, with a chilling air of finality, and went on about their business as though he no longer existed.

At that, a girl couldn't be too careful about this matter of being friendly. If she let on to a soldier that she could speak English, she soon found herself surrounded by a score of soldiers, all talking at the same time and asking her such questions as: "Where d'ya live, babe?"—"How old are ya?"—"Ya gotta sister, huh?"—"How about a date, chick?"—"You speakie English, huh?" These questions would almost be drowned out by the raucous comments of the others: "Aw, you ain't got the right tack-ticks, gimme a chance to tawk to 'er!" "Out of the way, wolf, let a gentleman handle this." "Give her air, can't you see she's snowed under?" "Aw, you're just

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

a square from nowhere. She wouldn't even look at you!"

Of course our young lady of noble Nordic lineage soon learns that to be silent and chilly is the best way to prevent being completely inundated by such persiflage in a strange tongue, coming from even stranger men. And thus our thwarted soldier returns to camp with a heavy heart and a none-too-pleasant feeling toward this cold country and its inhabitants. If, on the other hand, he is a dauntless Lothario at heart, and if he is fortunate enough to obtain frequent passes to town, he eventually does succeed in getting a girl friend. Perhaps she has seen him dancing at the café a number of times before she succumbs to his charms, or maybe she has seen him frequently in the shop where she works. Maybe her girl friend knows him and makes the proper introductions. No matter; he is not an absolute stranger to her when she finally consents to have a date with him.

Traditions of many generations are too inexorably instilled in her to permit of her being picked up by a total stranger. That is, unless she is a prostitute, or is on her way to prostitution. In the face of these traditions it has been hard for the Icelandic "stulkan" to accept the easy social standards of the American soldier without inviting formidable criticism from her own family, if not public reprobation in the form of a number issued to her by a committee whose re-

sponsibility it is to judge her of "easy virtue." There was, it seemed, no happy medium; a girl was either a "nice girl" who did not attend open-invitation dances nor be seen in the company of men, or she was a numbered trollop.

It was hard to choose, particularly if she liked this young man who knew how to dance so well and who, although he spoke "English," used so many strange words and phrases that intrigued her. If she finally summoned up the courage to accept him as a friend, she might go so far as introducing him to her family, who would receive him with courtesy but not without great misgivings. Rarely did she bring the soldier into the family circle, however . . . and where to go, and what to do, became the soldier's problem. He did not like to take her to the café, where she might be "wolfed" and irretrievably lost to him. Going to the movies was no real solution—what they both enjoyed was dancing together. Where to go, then? At this point he would come face to face with an ironical fact: he had the girl—a great achievement in itself—but he had no decent place to take her.

If he were just a corporal, he would not be aware, perhaps, that the largest and finest hotel in all Iceland is not any larger than our smallest city hotels at home. (The Hotel Borg, the best in Reykjavik, offers dining and dancing, but it is reserved for officers only.) He would not know, and perhaps he

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

would not care, with a pretty girl on his arm and no place to take her, that the Borg at one time admitted the enlisted men, but was forced by crowding and strained feelings to restrict itself to officers, whose numbers were vastly smaller. Even the Hekla became out of bounds, not because of inadequate space but because the rowdy element brawled, fought and rioted. Therefore, the Hekla's doors too were closed to men in the ranks.

This, of course, made it tough for the soldier who knew how to have a good time without being disorderly and destructive. No matter how hard he tried to understand these restrictions as necessary measures, however, his resentment mounted to a degree where he did not even want to see reason. On such occasions he was apt to lapse into moments of self-pity, with the comment: "To be an enlisted man is to be and have nothing," or, "The officers grab off everything—and to hell with us guys!"

Perhaps this is a typical soldier's grievance the world over, in every and any army. But in Iceland, in those early days, it was more often the topic for conversation than a casual gripe. For weeks after the Center had opened they continued to carp on the subject, tossing it back and forth as though they had nothing else of interest to think or talk about. It was almost with a perverse pleasure that they prophesied: "Wait and see, we won't have it long." I agreed that this was quite possible, but only if they behaved

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

like hoodlums and were stupid enough to destroy their own property. The fact that there were no Military Police on duty strengthened my side in this debate: the Center was the property of every American soldier, consequently each soldier was individually responsible for its law and order. The fate of their Center rested entirely in their own hands.

PRIOR to the opening, the plan of having Military Police on duty at the Center had been discussed from every angle. It was at best a delicate subject, which required delicate handling: the M.P.s do not shine as the most popular organization in the Army. On the contrary, as an outfit they are set apart. Avoided, eluded, antagonized and oftentimes deliberately baited, these soldiers work under trying circumstances most of the time. A few, laboring none too gracefully under the weight of authority, are apt to throw their weight about in a manner that is officious. So *all* M.P.s, good, bad or indifferent, are, sad to say, called "rats"; and in Iceland they were called "Texas Rats."

This was not by any means the chief reason why we decided against having this military authority represented at the Center. Both Mary and I felt that the first step toward "centralized recreation" should be free of certain restrictions that might not be at all necessary. We also thought that the best we could offer the men, under such limited conditions, was a

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

homelike atmosphere primarily. To start with rules and regulations was to suggest trouble and, at the same time, destroy the essence of home. We wanted to start at scratch and cross the bridges of trouble only when we came to them. Let rules be born of necessity and not anticipation, we said; the men themselves will co-operate with us in maintaining law and order. Our unwavering faith in them was rewarded many times over throughout the entire year.

We realized, naturally, that the schoolhouse Center was not by any means going to solve the recreation problem in toto. The two most urgent requests of the soldiers still could not be answered: dances and a place to bring their girls. There our hands were virtually tied, because the school had been loaned to us on condition that we allow no Iclander, man or woman, to frequent our place. There was no fighting this stipulation, since it had emanated from the Icelanders themselves. To have been given the inch, as it were, and not the ell, was hard to take. Also, this restriction was rather difficult to explain to the soldiers, who asked repeatedly: "Why can't we have a dance here?" "Why can't we bring our girls here?" It was just as well not to stir up their animosity by telling them the main reason. When Mary and I shrugged off their questions by pointing out to them how small the rooms were, we got away with it until we were asked why girls could not be brought in,

and then we had to tell the truth. Even if the six rooms were the size of ballrooms, we could hardly call it "giving a dance" with only Mary and me as the "girls."

A lot of other diversions would have to take the place of dances. Our program in general would have to expand without losing the ground that we had already gained. Camp programs would continue as before, with the secretaries pitching in. The small recreation huts at various posts, which Betty Clark and Ethel Rea were assigned to maintain and to visit several times a week, did not permit them much leisure to assist us in this new endeavor. If we had thought that we were short handed before the Center opened, now we knew it; and we began looking for new workers to arrive with each incoming convoy. The Center was scheduled to be open from one to ten, every day in the week. When and if the secretaries were free and disposed to pitch in, Mary and I could perhaps count on them for a little help. But it was an all-time job for us, and there was no assurance that one of us would not be pulled off now and then for a camp program.

The ball began rolling in earnest now. Events began shaping up for the big day when our own Center would open, which could not be later than September 15, as school resumed on that date. We resigned ourselves to the fact that we would have to make

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

things do or do without until then. If dances and girls were out of the question, we would make up for them, we thought, by offering every possible diversion available at that time.

It was felt that the points of interest in the city of Reykjavik might lend themselves to sightseeing tours. Also, museums and art exhibits, their locations and opening hours, were not advertised in English. The gymnasium, swimming pool and theaters did not operate on an easy-to-understand schedule. Doris Thain suggested that someone undertake the task of collecting and classifying this information. Because of her long-standing interest in Iceland, the people and their customs, Doris herself was assigned to the small Information Center that had been built near the Square. She went into action at just about the time our Center opened, and within a few days she was operating full-speed ahead.

The soldiers availed themselves of the opportunity to see the town under the guidance of another American, for Doris conducted the tours in her spare time. I know that she must have had her hands full answering their questions, for when she closed at five o'clock the men trooped into the Recreation Center and plied me with many more. Where could watches be repaired? Where could one get a good meal? Where could art supplies, jewelry, hardware, baby shoes, lingerie and silk stockings be purchased?

Would we shop for them? Yes, we would—simply because morale means “a lot of little things.”

Another favor repeatedly requested of us was to locate friends for both soldiers and sailors, and to make it possible for them to meet each other again. In most instances it was a sailor who had just arrived on the island and, knowing that a school chum or childhood friend was “somewhere in Iceland,” would request us to locate the soldier, if possible. Through the kind co-operation of S——, a Warrant Officer, more often than not we were successful; and it was most gratifying when we were able to witness the meeting of two close friends far from home, or to bring cousins or sometimes even brothers together.

I ONCE had said, facetiously, that I would be happy if I could learn a little something new every day. I ate these words several times over in the course of our first week at the Center. On the first day I learned that we did not have enough space; the second day taught us that we did not have enough chairs; and on the third day we found that there were innumerable fire hazards in all six rooms. True, we had water and sand buckets in every room, and we had bought up the one and only stock of ash trays in Iceland. Still, we did not have enough. They were small, of the souvenir type, and they filled up in an incredibly short time. Some soldier would carelessly toss a newspaper on the smouldering heap—and

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

the next thing we knew there would be a sudden frightening smudge. Mary and I were kept on the jump to empty the butts, but there was never any catching up. As soon as Room Six had been checked it was time to start all over again in Room One. There was an eternal fussing with magazines and newspapers, which, if allowed to roam about too freely, soon imparted a cluttery look to all the rooms. We had few tables for the many magazines and no proper racks for the newspapers. And so we learned that one orderly was not enough to help us keep the place clean and homelike. It was a long while before we had another one assigned to us, and until then we learned to do without. It was indeed the little things that counted.

With some fine "management" we continued to have coffee made in a near-by mess kitchen. Twice a day, afternoon and evening, we served ten gallons of the "best coffee ever to be found in Iceland."

Participation in the activities of the Center suddenly doubled, and it was obvious that the coffee hour had been grapevined about in the American and English camps. Two long lines of soldiers, sailors, marines and merchant seamen, British and American, formed and were served, and then formed again for second cups and more cakes if there were any left. As a matter of fact, the coffee hour was no longer an hour, for in less than ten minutes our ten-gallon pot was drained to the very last drop, and of the

eight hundred "sinkers" not one remained. Following the normal course of events, this situation began to roll itself up into a ball of trouble: the American soldiers could not always arrive in time to get their share of refreshments, and, added to this, the British were rapidly outnumbering our men. British patronage increased; in no time our Center had the air of a British service club, and we observed that many American soldiers stepped in, looked around for an empty chair and, finding none, walked out disconsolately and did not return again.

The average American soldier does not begrudge sharing with others less fortunate than himself. Well fed to the point of sleekness, he represents the most prosperous and best-equipped army in the world. He knows it, and having seen the conditions under which other armies exist, he is only too willing to share. I do know that not one of our men resented the fact that the British visitors consumed most of the coffee and cakes. "They're hungry, poor devils, let 'em have it," was the general comment, but where *could* the American soldiers go for diversion if their own Center was so crowded at all times? It was apparent that we were trying to serve two armies when we barely had facilities for one. Yet there was nothing we could do, inasmuch as our organization serves one and all without discrimination, reservations or barriers of any kind. Such encompassing philanthropy was not working at all satisfactorily: we were

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

defeating our own purpose, for the men we were to serve could not avail themselves of our services.

We had reached a most discouraging impasse when, as luck would have it, the British themselves came to our rescue. The situation, they conceded, was indeed extremely unfair to our men, who could only go to the NAAFI and the Salvation Army hut when accompanied by a British soldier. Hence, orders were issued from British headquarters to the effect that no British soldier was to patronize our Center except in the company of an American soldier.

This timely measure left Mary and myself with mingled feelings of relief and regret, for we had made many friends among the British visitors. They are great singers and lovers of music; and we missed their fine voices at our "sings."

I particularly missed a tall, gaunt toothless old corporal who had made it a point to arrive promptly at three every afternoon, gulp down *one* cup of coffee and *one* doughnut and then, with feverish haste, collect trayful after trayful of used cups. These he washed and returned to the serving table in a twinkling. As soon as the coffee hour was over and everything had been restored to order, he departed immediately. During the rush of serving I was not able to talk to him, but after the coffee pot had been emptied, and while he helped me wash and stack the cups, I questioned him in an effort to get him to talk.

It was obvious that he, like many others, was lonely and eager to unburden himself. Had he had any left, he would probably have given his eyeteeth to do so. For many weeks, though, his conversation was confined to brief answers punctuated by little bows or tugs at his forelock.

I was not accustomed to the form of respect shown us by the British enlisted soldiers. Though flattering, perhaps, it was difficult to feel natural when face to face with their overly courteous, almost subservient manner of "attention." Their attitude did not inspire the same camaraderie I felt toward the American soldiers, who patted me on the back (none too gently) and casually called me by such endearing names as Sis, Toots, Baby, Sweetheart, Screwball, and Gadget.

When the old corporal finally did unbend and the floodgates were opened, he rambled on and on in a rich accent rendered completely unintelligible at the start by a toothless lisp and a very bad stutter. Catching a word here and there, I gathered that he had seen trouble, and plenty of it. His home had been bombed and his entire family had been killed. He had also seen action; and I am sure that he was one of the many Dunkirk men then stationed in Iceland, although I was never able to confirm this because the subject was carefully avoided in conversations between the British and Americans. However, it was

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

clear that he had gone through some nerve-racking experiences that had shaken him up mentally and physically. The day arrived when he sadly informed me that he could no longer come to the Center, according to the new order. I invited him to come whenever he wanted to, as my guest, knowing full well that he would not take unfair advantage of my invitation. Thereafter he came in once a week, downed his coffee and sinker, hustled the cups back and forth, stuttered cheerfully through the final cleanup, saluted and was gone.

The British corporal was missed for his own sake rather than for his K.P. services. We always had our pick of volunteers for the serving, but usually, in their enthusiasm to supply me with clean cups, more than one was broken. Breakage was overlooked, inasmuch as the morale benefitted where the soldiers took an active interest in the maintenance of their Center. And so the cups continued to be shuttled back and forth between the reception room and the small teachers' conference room that was our kitchen. Those who wished, washed while I served. This system was not satisfactory, for little tell-tale coffee stains and sugar residue in supposedly clean cups indicated that in their haste our volunteer washers were overlooking certain hygienic factors necessary for the continued good health for all concerned.

Soon I decided to wash the cups myself, and the

serving was turned over to Mary. However, before she could serve so much as ten cups, a soldier would ask for a ping-pong ball or stationery, or another would ask her to do him a favor; but more often she was begged to return to the piano. If she demurred because she had to serve, there were too many men who were willing to pinch-hit for her, and so two were delegated to "dish it out," usually in the following manner: "ALLLLLL right now, you chowhounds! Here it is" (banging ladles against the pot) "JAVA! Come and get it! COME AND GET IT WHILE it's HERE AND HOT! This here's reel cawfee" (bang, bang) "right from the good old U.S.A." (BANG) "This ain't no G.I.! THIS is the REEL McCoy! All right, all right, all right!" (bang, bang, bang) "Step in line and step right up for the best coffee on the island! It's hot! It's good! IT'S FREE!"

That the coffee was hot, good and free no one doubted, but few could believe that the brew actually was Government Issue, "because it was too good." All too soon, though, it was with profound sorrow and regret that we were obliged to forego our coffee time late in November; for it was then that the repercussions of the coffee shortage began to be felt in Iceland. It was keenly missed by the men who came to the Center cold and wet after dock detail; it was missed by those of us who had watched reserve and shyness melt away under the mild influence of the brew.



ALT I LAGI—"OKAY"

"There remains to this day a strong suggestion of the Irish in the looks . . . of the Ivrelander."

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

IN KEEPING with our agreement, preparations were made to move out of the Center on the eve of July Fourth. Shortly before ten o'clock Frank Hagan showed up in the middle of a community sing. "Boys," he said, "we've got to move every stick of furniture out of this place before eleven o'clock tonight—and when the Icelandic elections are over we are going to move right back again. As you leave, please pick up a chair, books, games—anything—and follow me." They did, and inside of fifteen minutes the place was stripped bare. Pictures were left on the walls and one pool table remained. Mary and I hoped that the return would be as easy to accomplish as that memorable move out.

Well, it wasn't. Four days later we were back to work again; and as each chair was returned, we were amazed to see how shabby it had become. Not one month had passed since we first moved in, but our ping-pong tables, new then, now wobbled wearily. Cues were without tips. Our new rugs had that tired, frayed look which suggested years of service instead of a few weeks. The results of this mental inventory did not surprise Mary and me, for one look at the guest register revealed the hundreds upon hundreds who had come to the Center since it was first opened. Who cared, then, if the equipment showed signs of wear as long as it was being put to such good use? Besides, the soldiers were becoming conscientious about keeping things in order, now that the Center

was unquestionably theirs. One out of ten soldiers, we discovered, was inordinately proud of the Center. This pride sought expression in a proprietary but helpful attitude toward Mary and myself. More often than not we benefitted by this interest, for it meant that "Someone" would repair the broken ping-pong rackets, "Someone" would repair the radio, or "Someone" would paint a sign for us. There was always a soldier who *would* do these things for us, but it was hard to find the one who could do the job right.

The soldier who could repair cue tips and did so yesterday had been transferred today to another location far from Reykjavik. Three more cues are out of circulation for lack of tips, yet not one can be spared. Who can fix them? Ten men volunteer, but not one knows how to mend them properly. Or the radio won't work. "Where's that soldier who repaired it for us last week?" "Oh, he won't be able to come in for three weeks—but we'll fix it." In the process of fixing, the schoolhouse fuses are fixed so that the lights won't go on and the radio is fixed for once and for all. It is doubtful now if a super repair man will ever be able to put it back in commission again. . . . Willing but inexperienced and clumsy hands doubled our troubles. Soon enough, we learned that volunteers are not to be depended upon at all times, but we also discovered that the general spirit of helpfulness on the part of all the men did something to our own

morale. That was the spirit that kept us going in spite of everything.

This Center began to bring us closer to the men in many ways. We began to pick up little scraps of information, here and there, that led us into some of their problems about which we could do nothing. Liquor was one of them. When thirst ran high in a soldier, he collected thirty dollars and went in search of a bootlegger. With luck he was able to make a deal with a merchant seaman (British or American) or an Icelander who might be well versed in this sort of trade. In return for his thirty dollars he got a sealed fifth of Scotch or, occasionally, of rye. Sometimes, when nothing else was available, it was possible to purchase the rum rations accumulated by the British seamen. This alternative was not particularly desirable unless the rum could be purchased direct from the seaman himself, with the assurance that it was genuine grog. In most cases the rum passed through many hands, suffering in the process certain losses, adulterations and additions that did not always yield the desired effect upon the final consumer.

The rum market soon turned into a racket and, before long, a very dangerous one for the soldier who purchased through that medium. Soldiers, helplessly sick, began to be found about town and along the roads back to their camps. Their condition was seri-

ous and several died as a result of drinking a concoction flagrantly called rum. Upon analysis it was discovered that this deadly drink contained the sort of ingredients that might easily be found in anti-freeze solution. The taste and smell had been more or less camouflaged with one or two jiggers of rum. Before a diligent investigation had brought to light the source of this "Black Death" (as it came to be known), I had an experience with one of its victims.

It all had to happen on one of those days when nothing goes right. At an hour when attendance was at its peak, a wild-eyed soldier approached me while I was serving coffee: "Nurse, a guy is dyin' down in the cellar—you'd better go down right away!" There it was; the thing that I had been fearing for so long had finally happened. On top of that, to be taken for a nurse . . . I'd be expected to administer professional aid, and that was something else I had been dreading for some time. Full of the blackest misgivings, I dropped everything and headed for the basement. Not knowing exactly what I could do for a dying man, I nabbed a soldier. "Phone the M.P.s and tell them that there is a sick man here. . . ." Close on my heels was another soldier who, saints be praised, was a Medical Corpsman. In the dark, far recesses of the cellar we found our man. To my immense relief he was quite alive but in such pain that he no doubt wished he were not. We did what we could for him—hoping that the ambulance would

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

arrive shortly. But it must have been an off-day for the M.P.s and the ambulance, for it was a long time before they showed up. Fortunately this particular victim did not die, but had it not been for the kind generosity of an Icelandic family who lived in one part of the basement, he well might have. When they learned of our predicament, they insisted that the soldier be brought into their home where he could be put to bed and treated for "chills."

ANOTHER moment of anxiety, from time to time, occurred when the General paid us one of his brief and always unexpected visits. These important occasions were rarely propitious, so far as I personally was concerned. I was always caught in some unprepossessing act, such as emptying waste baskets, washing cups, or flourishing a dust rag about. Not that I was busy at those things all the time, for I did have moments of leisure wherein "my face was on," my hair was combed and my hands were clean. But such moments never seemed to coincide with the General's "inspections." Perhaps, though, my concern and embarrassment over my *deshabille* were unnecessary, in view of the nature of his visits. The General did not call to pay his respects socially. When he arrived there was an expression on his face that implied a deep concern, going beyond the ostensible intention of his questions and comments.

"Are the men co-operating in helping you?"

(Meaning: "Are the men sufficiently respectful to refrain from rioting?") "Yes sir, indeed they are!" His quick look takes in the soldiers, who are now standing at attention. "At ease, men!" He smiles, and we proceed to the next room. Someone is playing the piano, and everybody is so absorbed in the singing that no one notices our important visitor. He hurries through, fearing to disturb them and bring them to attention. In the reading room his discerning glance at the men who are reading and writing catches the eye of a few who, in their startled confusion at seeing the General, make clumsy or tentative efforts to come to attention. A smile and a wave of the hand puts them at ease and we hurry on.

There is no ambiguity surrounding his next comment: "This is a fire hazard. The boys are not using the ash trays. Signs must be made to the effect that they do so, or *you* must see to it that they do!" (How true. Those damned ash trays *would* have to be full and smouldering at a time like this! No wonder there were burning cigarettes on the table and window sills.) "We are trying to get more ash trays, sir. There aren't enough." (What a silly answer to give the General! Don't let it happen again, you fool!) On we go with the inspection, and his practiced eye takes in everything that might be a potential trouble maker.

This Center was of as grave importance to him as it was to us, or perhaps even more; for it was an experimental project which gambled with the diplo-

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

matic relationship between the Icelanders and the Americans. Destruction or damage to the property loaned to us by the natives was a grim possibility. We all knew it. All that we needed was a good fire to put us in the mud.

Yet we never had any drastic trouble; and our occasional difficulties we took as so many more lessons in the school of hard knocks, which is what every move in the prosecution of a war must always be.

7

"GOING HOME THE FIRST"

CONSIDERING the limitations, by now our affairs at the school had settled down to a systematic schedule which was satisfactory to all concerned. It did, however, suffer certain interruptions that were entirely unpredictable and unavoidable: air-raid alertes. As the summer progressed they seemed to increase in number and duration. Where once we had had them during the night or early morning, now we were obliged to grab our gas masks and helmets and lie low at just about the time the Center opened. If an alerte started at 12:30 noon, we were forced to remain at our quarters until it was over, which might not be for another hour. Usually, though, we managed to reach the Center in time; and for a while it was interesting to look out the windows and watch civilian behavior.

The same procedure was required of Icelanders as of the troops. In the early days of the Allied Occupation, air-raid shelters were constructed and civilian air-raid wardens were appointed to get the people off the streets. Yet when sirens howled and

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

screamed all about them, there was little or no reaction on the part of these good people. Few would enter the shelters, business went on as usual. “It can’t happen here, we are neutral,” they seemed to say. But when Focke-Wulfs started roaring over their little island, letting drop a few eggs from time to time, they became aware that “it” could happen—there, anywhere. It was almost comical to watch their immediate response to the warning sirens. Street traffic speeded up, bicycles whipped down the narrow streets, trucks and automobiles rounded the sharp corners with screaming tires. Shopkeepers burst out in the middle of sales, pedestrians ran helter-skelter across streets. This activity appeared to be panicky and without system, but in amazingly short order the streets were clear of vehicles, the sidewalks clear of people. Even the ducks on the pond in front of the schoolhouse seemed to have sought shelter, for not a one was to be seen.

The silence was broken only by snarls of the P-40s as, one by one, they took off from the near-by airport. One could see them as they gained altitude and flew over the city. By squinting your eyes you could almost visualize them as bullets, they went so fast. You wished them luck as the last one disappeared behind the horizon of chimney tops. Then silence again.

If soldiers were within a few minutes’ distance of their camp, they were required to return and report to their posts or battle stations. For the many men

on pass, who had come from distant camps and could not be expected to return, the alternative was to seek shelter until the alerte was over. As a rule, between one and two hundred men were in the Center with us until the "all clear" was given. For an hour or two, sometimes three, the men fretted nervously, wondering what was going on. What were they missing? Action? Maybe right over their camp, too! Silence crept in from the streets; no one felt like doing anything but look out the window, and wonder, and jingle coins in pockets nervously. The continued silence became heavy with meaning. It could mean only one thing. There *was* a show going on somewhere. They felt cheated. "Shh," someone would command. "I can hear something—sounds like ack-ack." Everybody froze into a tense attitude of listening. As we strained to catch the distant sound, you could almost hear the feathering sound of a gull's wings as it flashed by the window.

"Say, now," a shrill bright voice jars the silence: "Y' oughta seen the three Focke-Wulfs that come over . . ." "Shut up," orders a harsh stern voice. Again an attitude of listening, again silence. This, I thought, was the sort of thing that would drive anyone mad if it had to be taken as a steady diet. Wait, wait, wait—and nothing happens. It is deadly. Do this very often and one will wish, hope and pray that something *will* happen, no matter what. . . .

No wonder the piano is attacked with a vengeance

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

when the alertes are over. It is a good way to let off steam. The men who have been with us run out to collect all the rumors regarding this latest alerte. Other men come into the Center after a long wait in another shelter, and everybody asks, “Where was it? Was it the real McCoy? Oh, you say they sighted them over Camp Blank? Somebody said it was ten miles north of Camp Humdrum!” Now we have a fresh batch of rumors to provide a topic of conversation. We hear that anywhere from one to five Focke-Wulfs were shot down; we hear that several prisoners were taken alive, and then we hear that not one was taken alive because (a) they were all burned to a crisp when the planes burst into flames, (b) they were all drowned when they fell into the sea, (c) they managed to escape.

The only reason why we did believe that not all these alertes were “dry runs” was that they were usually followed by a display of souvenirs—some of them rather gory proofs of action. Shreds of German parachutes, bits of airplane metal, scraps of rubber from gas-tank linings were shown us in a furtive and secret manner. We never asked questions. We had learned not to, long ago. But usually we got stories here and there about the same time that these souvenirs were in evidence, and so could put two and two together, as it were. Not all such accounts were figments of the imagination. Although many were rejected by us as improbable, there were some left in

our memories that bore a modicum of truth. There was the story of the German bomber shot down with a crew of fifteen- and sixteen-year-old boys and an eighteen-year-old pilot. During the salvage job the bomber revealed a high perfection of instruments and certain advanced innovations all turned out in workmanship that was incredibly superior. Most surprising were the tires on this plane, for they were American made and had been laid in stock, no doubt, when pilot and crew were perhaps no more than ten years old.

The best story was that of the American pilot who, for a very good reason, was known as the Pilot-Who-Never-Said-Die. During an alert one day he shot above low-flying clouds in his P-40, looking for Jerry. He found him, too. In the customary dogfight that ensued, the American pilot either ran out of ammunition or his guns got fouled. During a long moment fraught with profane and futile thinking, the fuselage of the enemy aircraft passed directly in front of his propeller. An almost impossible idea presented itself to the pilot. Without a moment's hesitation, he "poured the coals" to his engine and headed for the tail surfaces. Revolving at such a terrific speed, his propeller had the effect of a buzz saw. Of course it was all over and done with in a split second, but our pilot was amazed to find that he was still alive and able to look back and see the enemy spinning earthward. Moreover, although his own

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

plane was terribly battered up and shot full of bullet holes, and the engine sounded as though it would never make it, he managed to limp back to the airport. The Air Corps men in charge of maintenance said it was a miracle that the P-40 could survive the terrific impact.

Then there was the Norwegian pilot, the only member of his large family to have escaped during the Nazi invasion. He fled, not to save his own life but to preserve it that he might save the lives of others of his countrymen. This nineteen-year-old was ultimately stationed in Iceland. Flying a short-winged fighter plane, he went far out to sea, day after day, searching for the raiders that had made Norway a convenient jumping-off place and were lurking about the coast of Iceland because of it. On days when all other aircraft were grounded the sound of his engine could be heard overhead. “There goes the Norwegian again—he’s either crazy or dumb to fly in this soup.” “Yeah,” would come the answer, “he might be crazy—he don’t seem to care whether he lives or not. He’s dumb, all right—dumb like a fox. He’ll find what he’s looking for, and when he does it’ll mean less Jerries in Norway!” For a long time Luck rode on the tail of this young Norwegian’s plane. No trace was ever found to tell when it deserted him.

Tales were many, too, of enemy submarines captured or sunk off the coast of Iceland. You could be-

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

few days or weeks they will have recovered and become quite normal again. Within two or three months of their return to the States, these same men would be back in the Center, laughing, talking as though nothing had ever happened to them.

Now more and more new faces appeared in the Center, faces that had a "fresh from the States" look. We could tell these men apart from the "veterans" not so much by what they said as by their bearing. "Hi, rookie. How do you like Iceland?" we'd ask. They were astonished. "How did you know I just arrived?" Well, for instance, the "rookie look" says: "So *this* is Iceland, the country that's got 'em all down 'cause the girls are chilly! Ha, lead me to 'em!" While the "veteran look" might say: "Today is like yesterday and tomorrow will be like today." The rookie look: "What! only cawfee in this joint? Hell, where's the nearest bar?" The veteran: "Boy, I wish our java back in camp tasted as good as this." Rookie: "Hey, you, Miss Red Cross (this oughta be a push-over), how about a date when you're off duty?" Veteran: "It sure sounds good to hear an American woman's voice again!" Oh, we could tell them apart easily enough. Such eloquent looks bespoke the mental comparisons they were drawing between our humble Center and the lavishly equipped facilities they had just left in the States. One had to make



ARTS AND CRAFTS

"Paintings of Icelandic scenes, portraits, and beautifully fashioned airplane and ship models."

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

allowances for them if these comparisons provoked audible comments.

“Give ’em time, in less than six months they’ll be only too glad to have a place like this to come to,” said the veterans with a chuckle. In a way you felt sorry for them; they were in for some sharp jolts, and the veterans were not going to make it any easier. “Sure, buddie, you can go to CooCoo Nut Grove . . . right in town here . . . good music, plenty of girls, and doesn’t close till three A.M.!” Another veteran interrupts: “Naw, the Pair-o-Dice Ballroom is the best, and that’s only a block away from here. . . . Has the biggest bar in the world and you can get any drink you want for a krona a shot!” The rookies’ eyes bug with incredulity: “Huh? We thought you couldn’t get drinks for less than a dollar!” They jingle the coins in their pockets and do some fast figuring; most of them have been cleaned out on the way over . . . finances down to a few bucks. . . . Still, if they get a pass . . . they might be able to do the town up if prices are that low. . . . They’ll ask for a pass anyway. “Now, I can tell you a nice quiet place to take your girl for cocktails and dinner . . . reasonable, too,” offers a tall sergeant with a serious look on his face that expresses the best of intentions. “The Hotel Borg has a nice quiet cocktail lounge with soft lights and sweet music. . . . Girls? Oh, plenty of ’em! Now, this young lady is Icelandic”

(pointing to me); "she'll be glad to have a date with you. She's got lots of time. . . . Sure, she can speak a little English—can't you?" This is my cue. I bark: "Yow!" But I can't go on. There is a limit to teasing, and there will be enough of it without my help. . . .

Despite the ever-increasing throngs of new faces, there were soldiers who impressed themselves upon our memories either by repeated visits to our Center or by virtue of their individuality. Mary and I knew the names of some, but in most cases we knew them by the nicknames that were suggested by their character, idiosyncrasies and appearance. Thus we knew Big Boy, Texas, Doc, Cookie, Carolina, Champ (our top-notch boxer), Shorty, General (the buck private who scorned all buck privates), Joe-the-Driver (who time and again helped us out with his bus when all other transportation had failed us). There was Sharpie, the soldier who stitched the crease in his GI trousers and had the shiniest shoes and buttons in the army.

And of course there was "Screwball," who had a new joke for us every time he came to the Center. "Say, Miss Mary, do you know there's only *one* thing wrong with Iceland?" She beams. "Only one thing? Well, landogoshen, boy, you're the first one I've met who hasn't found a thousand things wrong with Iceland. Do tell—what is it?" Now Screwball can hardly contain himself. Like a kid trying to stretch a lollypop by taking little licks now and then, he goes on:

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

“Yup . . . I didn’t think you’d believe it . . . but it’s true . . . everybody I’ve told says it’s true . . . uh-huh.” By now Mary knows that this is going to be a joke she has heard probably a thousand times. But she mustn’t let on that she’s heard it, for this is a game, and to “bite” is a part of her job. She does, and Screwball gleefully springs the joke: “The only thing wrong with it—*it’s above sea-level!* Ha, ha, ha!” He whoops and slaps his knees in paroxysms of laughter. When he recovers his breath, he adds: “A detail was sent out to pull the cork out of this island and sink it! Ho, ho, ho!”

Yes, we’ve heard that joke before; but even if you do like to laugh at your own jokes, it’s fun to have others laugh at them too. For a while we had a run on one joke that was on everybody’s lips: “Did ya hear the news?” You bite: “What news?” “Why, we’re goin’ home the first!” You bite again: “The first?” “Yeah, the first *chance* we get! Haw, haw, haw.” Duty is duty, but it was hard to bite and keep biting after that joke had gone the rounds for a month.

At that, some jokes were clever and original. Kim is best remembered in this respect. “This is a country,” he cracked, “where a ‘stuka’ is not a dive bomber, but a blonde you take into a dive!” He pauses meditatively. “Yes, I have a very pretty girl, lovely face, lovely figure, nice clothes and a nice set of tooth.” He rattles on in a serious manner and one

has to listen carefully to catch the quips that he lets fall here and there. He's a "natural." You wish you had more time to listen to his witticisms. He is refreshing, breezy, observant and humorously philosophical. In civilian life he would be a promising comedian. In Army life he is an M.P.

There were soldiers, too, who will always be remembered for their generosity, thoughtfulness and the helping hand they gave on countless occasions: Bob, Wayne, Jock, Larry, Tom, Sam, Terry, Johnnie, Wilkey, Wimpy—a host of others, whose full names are not forgotten, although they may not be told. Can we ever forget the soldier who brought us great bunches of flowers that would have cost at least ten dollars if we had purchased them through local florists? Where he got them we never knew, but regularly, once a week, he brought them to us with careful directions on how to make them last until his next visit. His contribution added something to the homelike atmosphere of our six rooms and was a constant reminder of his thoughtfulness.

Nor can such characters as "Boogie-Woogie" be easily forgotten. Hour after hour he pounded out every kind of tune in the same monotonous rhythm. Boom-tee boom-tee boom-tee boom-tee . . . over and over again. "Oh, Mary," I pleaded, "can't you get him away from that piano?" Equally distressed, Mary replied: "But how, Jane? After all, *he* is having such a good time . . . I haven't the heart to stop

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

him.” Yes, he is certainly enjoying himself, there can be no doubt of that, but there are some men who are driven out of the room by the racket. “Miss Mary,” says one, “please play for us . . . c’mon . . . we want to sing!” A soldier runs over to the perspiring boogie-woogie pianist. “Give way, Bud, Miss Mary is going to play!”

Another special case was the “Mad Russian,” who was always among the first men at the Center when it opened at noon. We came to know him more from his actions than his conversation, for he was a pleasantly laconic fellow. He was hardly mad, nor was he a Russian. There was a touch of the Slavic accent in his soft-spoken voice—maybe that was where the “Russian” came in. As for being mad, well. . . . He invariably headed for the piano and, not knowing one note from the other, he proceeded, as he put it, to “play off the vibrations” he had “collected since the day before.” His hands ran across the keyboard in search of a chord, and when he got the desired combination “Old Faithful” gave out a mournful minor wail which was repeated again and again. When he had exhausted one set of vibrations in this manner, his hands again searched across the keys until another, more mournful chord was discovered.

I could never quite make up my mind whether or not these chords were discordant, nor could Mary decide that point. He was, we admitted, too deep for us. We would have let it go at that had he not told

us sometime later that we too imparted certain vibrations which he felt compelled to express by means of the piano. And indeed, after he informed us of this fact, we observed that each time one of us hurried through the room there was a decided change in his playing. This was uncanny, for his back was to us and he could not see which of us it was. There was no fooling him, either. If we went through the room on tiptoe, he still knew the difference and expressed our "vibrations" accordingly. We outwitted him once when we both went through the room at the same time, but with results so distressingly cacophonous that we never tried it again. One more incident gave us further reason for calling him the "Mad Russian." He approached us one day with his face wreathed in the most beatific smile. "I have finally found the key to happiness—and I wish you to know it, that you may be happy too." He surveyed us with his gentle brown eyes. "I have just thrown away my watch. Now I am no longer a slave to time. I am free! Just think, that it should be as simple as all that!" He spread his hands and cocked his head to one side. "You have but to throw your watch away, and woosh!—you throw your troubles away along with it. Do this, I beg of you, and you will see. . . . You, too, will be free and happy, as God meant his children to be!" Maybe he wasn't so mad after all.

Among our most faithful visitors was "Duke-the-Doc," who replenished our First Aid Kit (of his own

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

volition) and whose solicitude over our health was evinced from time to time by such comments as: “Miss Mary looks tired. Can’t you get her to sit down and rest once in a while?” Or, “Cam, you ought to have your eyes examined again, you look as though your glasses needed to be changed!” And, “I’ve got something for that cough of yours, Jane—I think it will help you.” How could any of us forget such thoughtfulness? Or the visits of the “Gruesome Two-some,” whose wit ran along these lines: “You know, Jane, you are beautiful . . . in a gruesome sort of way!” Or the soldier I knew as “Dear Friend,” simply because he always entered the Center with “Dear, dear Jane. . . .” And “Bottles” and Ike, the pair who livened up the coffee hour with their running commentary, à la sideshow barkers. . . . And Dupont, better known as “Frenchie,” a jack-of-all-trades and master of the sweetest chords ever wheedled out of “Old Faithful.” . . . And Crawford, rarely seen but often heard over the phone to say in rich Southern accents: “Ah jest called to tell you that we’ll be home befo’ Chris’mus.” We would discuss this possible but highly improbable subject from all angles, and close with: “Bless!” (which is “Good-bye” in Icelandic.) And there were Harter, Pointer, Irving, Red, Sherman, Ben, Herbie, Dit, Tommy and Lew, Lee, Greer, Sterling, and the coterie-lovers of solid swing, Al and Charley. There were Lee and Kaufman, a comedy pair skilled in the art of purveying succulent

ensilage; Goldberg and Conto, equally clever in vitriolic wit, satire and legitimate Shakespeare.

There wasn't a moment when something was not going on that captivated the interest of all who came to the Center. Magicians, singers, impersonators, monologists; jam sessions, concerts, impromptu skits, all furnished by the men themselves. Long ago, before we got into the swing, we had facetiously remarked to one another that each one of us must be responsible for the morale of many thousands of men! That was before, long before, we "knew what the score was." Now we no longer made such foolish estimates.

"Hi—THE convoy's in and they're unloading the mail. They say there's over five hundred bags!" Who knows just how many bags there are, and who cares? All that matters is one thing: "The mail is here." Letters from home, packages from home. . . . One waits two, three and maybe four days before the mail has been sorted and delivered. That's known as "sweatin' out the mail." It means that we are going to be extra busy for a week or two. There will be a flurry of letters and pictures, and we are going to be told: "This here's a picture of my girl friend—ain't she a pip?" Reply: "Oh, she certainly is. My! You're a lucky fellow to have a girl like that waiting for you!" He beams. "You betcha!" Others: "Now that's Mom, and Pa's standin' behind Eddie, my kid brother—and

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

that's Susie, my sister. Gee, ain't she grown up—pretty, too!” He pauses for my comment. “Well,” I tell him, “you certainly have a nice family. Isn't it nice of them to send you all these pictures!” So then out come the letters: “Yeah, and they all write to me, too. Here, read this one, it's from my sister, Susie. She's got a boy friend now—tells all about it. Haw, haw, haw! I can't imagine that kid having a boy friend!” All in all, this is about the best mail he's had. He chuckles and leans back happily.

More pictures: “That's my wife and son,” says this man. “She writes here that he's getting to be more like me every day—but shucks! I don't think he looks like *me*, do you?” He hands me the picture that he has been looking at intently, now this way, now that. “I think that he looks like his father *and* his mother,” is the right answer. We are interrupted: “Lookie here, here is *my* son . . . first time I've seen him . . . born two months after I left the States. Ain't he something, though?” Pictures of girls go the rounds. Girls in bathing suits; girls decked out in their very gayest and best; girls in shorts, in slacks, in house-coats and—“Can't show you that one”—in the nude. Short girls, tall girls, beautiful girls, homely girls and more girls! Hundreds upon hundreds of letters and pictures—and packages! This is about the most important bit of defense work that the homefront can ever do.

Interspersed through the day's work, now, were

little requests that seemed to have small importance. Yet they were so often repeated that they became a rather important part of the "recreation program." "Have you a needle and thread? My button's come off." "Buttons sewed on while you wait, soldier!" We ply needle and thread several times a day until the occasion becomes almost a ceremony. "Look, mine is about off, too." It certainly is, and you take the hint. A blouse was handed to me one day showing quite an ingenious arrangement of safety pins, wire paper clips and cotter pins—each anchoring a button to its mooring. Our soldiers were outgrowing their uniforms. One thing led to another in the matter of sewing; and because soldiers like to watch, talk and kibitz, there seemed to be no end to the loose buttons.

While Cam was busily applying herself to this task one evening, she observed, out of the corner of her eye, a soldier furtively tearing off his buttons. When she had completed the job, he held up his blouse before her: "Look, Miss Cam, every one of my buttons have come off—ain't that awful?" They kept us busy, all right. "Say, I've got a lot of sewing I can bring in." "Can you darn socks, too?" Cracks one: "Do you take in washing? I can keep you busy doing mine!" They all talk at once and everybody feels good. Even the shy ones want to talk, now that you can't look right at them. "When I get my stripes, will you sew them on for me?" Yet they are, on the whole,

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

better seamstresses than most women. If you will sew on their stripes and buttons, they will put your shoulder insigne on with about the fanciest and neatest cross-stitch you'll ever see.

We become money changers, too. Every day men came in for Icelandic money to tide them over. Many were mere kids, gay, light-hearted, breezy, sporting tricky little mustaches and beards. I call these “Balbo mustaches,” which were all the rage among the Air Corps men. For all their mustaches, fleece-lined short leather jackets and “duckbill” caps set at a rakish angle, and for all their swashbuckling ways, they were terribly young and uninitiated. They had the “rookie look.” I think that I liked them best of all for their attitude toward their officers. There seemed to be a great feeling of understanding and camaraderie between these youthful officers and their crews. “And,” as one officer told me, “why not? The men obey commands willingly, inasmuch as their well-being and safety depend upon us. In turn we depend upon them, and so there is great respect on both sides.”

I often reminded myself of this remark, for I had begun to weary of the gripe: “To be a private is to have nothing, to be an officer is to have everything.” Whether or not this was the truth was definitely none of our business. However, it was definitely a meaty topic for conversation as far as the men were concerned. It was a subject that we wished to avoid—

yet someone had to listen to a man if he had to talk it out of his system and give vent to pent-up emotion. To see his point (which more often than not we did) and sympathize with him was like being between the devil and the deep. We managed to change the subject and talk about something else, but when soldiers whom we knew and liked well said, "Betcha wouldn't have a date with me because I'm only a private," we were left with a feeling of impatience, disappointment and helplessness. Impatient with him because it was a childish thing to say; disappointed because he could think we favored only bars and not stripes; and helpless because, despite their vast numbers and your own limited time, you could not date one without dating all. We felt hurt and disappointed because by then they should have known that we liked them for the men they were, and not for their rank. Some of the finest men we knew were buck privates, corporals and sergeants.

There was precious little time for dating. We rarely left the Center much before ten-thirty, and we had to report to quarters by twelve-fifteen. By closing time our feet burned, our ears rang from the conversation and noise, and we were glad to call it a day. After a while we began to observe that going to parties after work was tiring. The same hubbub and noise prevailed. It was not a refreshing change; all parties had the quality of sameness, the same

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

monotonous means of escape. In time we discovered that there was more fun to be had right in our own Center. The atmosphere was pleasant and homey, and a man couldn't bear a gripe too long. When he had griped just so much, he began to talk about the things he had done in civilian life. Many had interesting stories to tell—about their jobs, their experiences, their plans for the future.

Now, more than ever, men were coming in from all walks of life, from all over America. Theirs was a rich store of information, interesting, instructive, and you listened because you wanted to, not because it was your job. You wished only that you had more time and could listen for your own entertainment; but this would make you guilty of “individual attention”—you simply could not do it in the face of the droves and droves of others who also had “something to say.” During our dinner hour we no longer returned to the hospital but ate with the men in the little restaurants that were open to them. We could not date them, but we could have dinner with them. Those meals were always pleasant, for then we could give two or three men, instead of scores, our undivided attention. We enjoyed, too, this brief respite from a steady diet of GI chow. What did it matter if the meat hidden under the thick gravy might be pony meat? It was well cooked and had an uncommonly good flavor—and it tasted better than Spam! What did it matter that all restaurants had the same

unvarying menu of soup, fish, meat and potatoes? Just to get away from regular routine was a change for us.

A desire for change was in us all, and was manifested in a number of ways. We took to cooking extravagant little meals on our pot-bellied stove. At what were reasonable facsimiles of our delicatessen stores at home, we purchased mixed salads at a dollar a pound. Most of the grocery stores carried small supplies of American canned foodstuffs at sky-high prices, and before we got through these simple meals cost us an average of four dollars per person; but they were worth it. Dehydrated food can taste like hay after six months of it.

Whether it also showed a desire for change, or was owing to the fact that we were to receive the Duke of Kent at a tea to be given in his honor when he arrived, I do not know; but just before his untimely death we began to regard ourselves a bit critically. Our uniforms were beginning to fray about the cuffs, wear at the elbows and bag sadly in the most overworked portion of our skirts. Our "miner caps" had also suffered the ravages of time and the elements. The once perky bow was tattered and the once stiff visor hung limp as wilted lettuce on the forehead. New uniforms were on the way, but just when they would arrive was anybody's guess. A new hat, now—that would pep us up considerably! Idea! Make our own hats from our cast-off uniform skirts.

“GOING HOME THE FIRST”

There was enough good material for an overseas cap. It was hard to believe that doing a little thing like that could give us a thrill and a lift. It did, however; and more especially when the boys noticed and commented favorably.

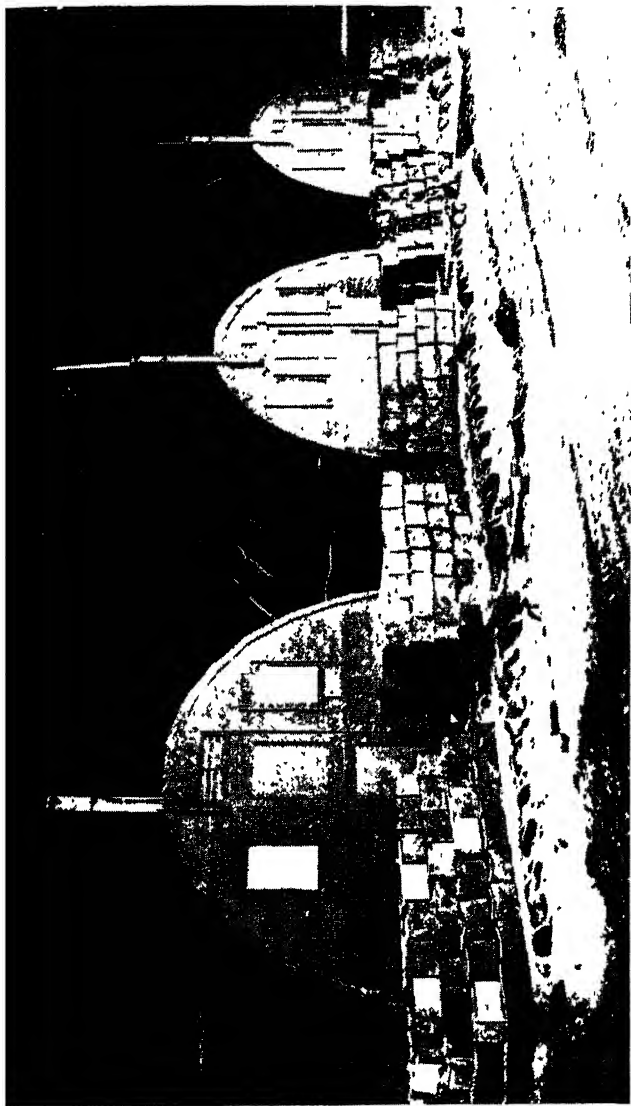
Worried by the stiff pace that we were all traveling, the Recreation Director and the Field Supervisor, Frank Hagan and Lake Russell, decided to kill two birds with one stone. Akureyri, second-largest city in Iceland, was up for consideration as the base of a recreation center for our troops who were stationed in those parts. The location had to be surveyed with this in mind. Why not take along four girls, and, as other trips would have to be made later, take the others until everybody had enjoyed a break in the routine? It was considered a mighty good idea. Doris, Betsy Lane, Cam and myself were selected for the first trip. To think that an uncomfortable trip of not more than two hundred and twenty-five miles, and not lasting more than a week, could give us a thrill of anticipation such as we would feel if we were packing for a trip around the world! It seemed absurd and childish. Yet there again our sense of values had changed in six months' time.

8

PROGRESS

OUR trip to Akureyri afforded very little change, for we gave programs at all the Army camps en route. Nor was it much of a rest, for we drove all day over bumpy narrow roads that left us wilted and weary at the end of each ride. Still, it was fun just to be going somewhere again. Moreover, we stayed at Icelandic hotels along the way, and this was a diverting experience. With the exception of the Borg, the Icelandic hotel is something to marvel at. It vies with "Grand Hotel"—better, with Grand Central Station—in its traffic and activity, which seem to go on night and day without a break.

It was a small inn, rather than a hotel, at which we decided to billet our first night. I do not believe that it boasted more than fifteen rooms, and each room was really a cubicle which allowed little or no pacing of the floor. As people came and went all through the night, we wondered how this steady turnover of trade could be accommodated under such limited conditions. Heavy boots tramped up



COMPANY STREET, 3.30 P. M.

"Winter nights that stretch into noon and fall again not two hours later . . ."

PROGRESS

and down the narrow stairway that was next to my room. Voices muttered outside my door. There was the sound of other doors being opened and closed, the muttering continued, and I had visions of a waiting line forming outside. Suddenly my door opened and in the soft light that filtered through the drawn curtains I saw a head shaking in vexation. The head shook for some time while a disgruntled weary voice mumbled something in the language I could not understand. The head was then withdrawn, the door shut (none too softly), and I was left to my own thoughts once more.

They must be sleeping in shifts, I thought, and they feel that I have overslept my quota. Phew! How could anybody ever sleep on this hard little couch with the built-up head? Toss, turn and squirm. Hard and unyielding, too. Stretch, and one's feet hang a good six inches beyond the foot of the Icelandic "bed." There is only one way in which to accomplish a good night's rest—that is, do as the Icelanders do. Hike all day—tramp the lava fields, the glaciers and the mountains—until, in a state of exhaustion, you can sleep comfortably on a bed of spikes. . . . Through the rest of that night our slumbers were broken on an average of every fifteen minutes. We all compared notes the following morning, and learned that Frank had had perhaps the most amazing nocturnal experience; upon his return from a near-by camp he had discovered two young ladies

occupying his room, and out of chivalry he had returned to spend the rest of the night in a hut.

A good portion of the trip was spent in easing the car over rough mountain roads. These are open only between June and October. For seven months of the year, all travel to and from Akureyri is confined to coastal steamers. Icelandic buses whipped by us on the stretches, making up for time lost on the tortuous mountain tracks. Although we ourselves were packed in like sardines, we were glad we did not have to ride in the public conveyances. Bus passengers in Iceland are subject to seasickness caused by the continuous swaying and rolling, mile after mile.

On the way up we were blessed with especially fine weather; fleece-wool cumulous clouds drifted placidly on the bluest of horizons, and we lamented continually the ban on non-military cameras. In the countryside between Reykjavik and Akureyri there were steel-gray fjords, or what I liked to think of as fingers of the sea, running a good many miles into the island. Between the mountain ranges were sandwiched countless valleys, each unbelievably green and fertile. The foothills boasted a growth of tough grass and heather, and on every mountainside and in all the valleys we saw sheep and the equally ubiquitous pony. As we neared our destination these small horses and their sure-footed leggy offspring were to be seen in greater numbers. More sensitive and spirited than the southern draft ponies, they

PROGRESS

chased about our car snorting, tossing their heads and kicking their heels, seeming to deride our laborious progress. I made up my mind to bring a pair back to the States with me—well, maybe one—until I discovered that it would cost at least four hundred dollars and perhaps the pony's life to do so.

Much to our surprise, we found the morale remarkably high in camps throughout the entire area. Naturally, this fact was of great interest to us. Why and how could this be, particularly where it was so desolate? Perhaps one reason was that the officers and men, isolated as they were, depended more upon each other for company and entertainment, with all joining in the fun during our program; or perhaps it was because the natives were more hospitable to our men. Wherever the small fishing towns were not completely inundated by troops, we observed that the inhabitants were more friendly with the American soldiers. This was likewise true in Akureyri. We met several soldiers whom we had known in Reykjavik. Spying us as we were crossing the main street, they bore down on us with yelps of pleasure, much to the amusement of the civilians. Their delight in having been transferred to Akureyri was obvious, for they all talked at once in the same vein: the girls were friendly, the people were friendly, and oh, it was just swell.

We were completely captivated by this little city that sprawled half-moon fashion about the tip end

of a long sea finger. It was late afternoon when we arrived. With no program scheduled for that evening, we were free to do as we wished, so, as soon as we had found accommodations in a private home, we all went swimming in the local pool. The water was warm, quite tepid in fact, but it served to wash away the lava dust and also gave us prodigious appetites.

Later, to satisfy our curiosity, we started on foot through the town as a party of five; but in no time Cam and I found ourselves standing all alone on a pier, watching Norwegian mechanics hard at work through the interminable twilight on one of their seaplanes. They paused to look at us, and nodded smiling when we said "Good evening." They thought, not having seen our uniforms before, that we were Icelanders. However, when they overheard us talking to the guard in a language that was unmistakably American, they came over to us immediately.

Two were Norwegians, and the third was American-born. Would we please have a cup of coffee with them, they asked, in their new club right on the dock? In response to their offers we had several cups, and more and more pastry. "Eat as much as you like," they urged. "This is our place, the first we have had since we came to this God-forsaken island. Our people finally obtained this building when the British moved out. We have cleaned, repaired and painted the rooms." They added, almost apolo-

getically, "Oh, we haven't finished it yet; we have just moved in, and there is still much work to be done."

The American Norwegian was cursing the luck that had sent him to Iceland for over two years. It was, it seemed, the same old story—he wanted action. The older Norwegian, bewhiskered and wise, was willing to play the game of cat and mouse. "We'll get there soon, you wait and see. You will get action." He smiled at us blandly. The American kept saying over and over, "We'll rot here, that's all—just plain rot." The young smooth-faced Norwegian said nothing, but it was evident that he wished to hear something else for a change.

"Yes," they said, in reply to our questioning looks at the women who were in the room. "They are Norwegian refugees who escaped." *Escaped* seemed hardly the word, yet it was all in the way you looked at it; for the pleasant smiling woman who stood behind the pastry counter, perhaps it was an "escape" to come through the reign of terror with nothing left except the breath of life and the clothes she wore. As for the younger woman who served us coffee and cakes, I could hardly think of her as having "escaped." When introduced to us, she smiled and in polite acknowledgment greeted us in English. But the smile affected me strangely, and the words she uttered seemed to come from another world. Her face was etched clearly and unmistakably by all the

past emotions of fear, anguish and hatred that one human being could possibly have endured without dying.

No, she had "escaped" nothing, I thought. She had not escaped the plunder and pillage of her home; when that happened, something within her began to die. She had not escaped the vision of her aging father shot before her eyes. Nor had she escaped the rape of her younger sister, nor the death of both her brothers when they were caught in an act of sabotage. Little by little, a part of her had died—I was sure of it. To have escaped physical death was nothing compared to the death of that something which had been torn from her by degrees; yet the invisible spirit that holds every Norwegian to his task, no matter how great the odds against him, clearly flamed within her too.

In the middle of the impatient American's griping, a man stepped into the room and nodded: time to return to the seaplane. . . . It was twelve o'clock midnight, and still light enough for us to view the entire town before bedtime.

WE RETURNED in fog and rain to Reykjavik, in hopes of finding that the new workers had arrived from the States during our absence. They had not, but something at least had happened; the British Officers' Club was definitely ours and renovations on it had already begun. This was encouraging news, yet it

PROGRESS

was doubtful whether the rooms would be ready by September first. There was, it seemed, always something to blight our hopes.

We learned that Miss Baldwin was to return to the States, and there was a rumor that Helen Lee, Mr. Russell and Mr. McDonald were also to return. More rumors began to surround this subject; we were all to be home by Christmas. Because it took about three months to complete transportation plans, we were advised to tell Mr. Russell our wishes in the matter of returning home. Some of the girls wanted to stay on. Cam, Mary and I thought it would be a sound idea to get home by Christmas. We sometimes felt, nowadays, as though we had been on the little island all our lives; that we had done nothing else but work among men in uniform. Having become accustomed to uniforms, we began to find ourselves staring at the civilian clothes worn by merchant seamen who came into the Center. Civvies looked good to us, but mighty strange and out of place.

As a matter of fact, a lot of normal ordinary things were beginning to look peculiar—for instance, American newspapers—and the mere thought of a place called America struck us as nebulous, unreal and highly irrelevant. The boys who had come over with us not nine months ago joked about it. "We have just heard of a place called America—and what do you suppose?" With mock incredulity, "It is a big country covered with things called *trees!*"

This I would pretend to disbelieve, for conversations of this nature had become a game which we all seemed to enjoy playing. "That couldn't be true—trees are only a myth," I replied. "Oh yes, but it is true—and are we glad we don't have to live there!"

A two-months' recruit listens to this conversation. There is that characteristic expression on his face—a combination of scorn and wonderment.

"Cripes," he says sourly, "you're all nuts!"

"'Hut-nutty' is the word, friend, but you will catch on in time."

The veteran saunters off and the recruit approaches me. "Say, now, you can't tell me that you don't ever get homesick on this rock! I bet you get good and homesick, too!"

The boy is homesick, think I, and wants some company for his misery. To deny this would be to establish myself as a cold, rather unsympathetic person, devoid of a very normal emotion. More likely, I would be put down as a liar. So I tell him: "Yes, of course I have been homesick—the first three months are the toughest. It takes about that long to stop thinking of memories that make you unhappy; it takes about three months to quit wondering about the future, to quit comparing what you are doing here with what you were doing at home. At the end of six months you begin to realize that it is better to take each day as it comes. You might even become philosophic about it—like those men over

PROGRESS

there who are enjoying books for the first time in their lives. You might become humorous—or ‘nuts,’ as you called the fellows who were just with me. Or you may turn out to be a bitter cynic who gives everybody a pain in the neck. It is all up to you, of course, how you are going to take it. . . . Sure, I’ve been homesick. We *all* have been homesick at one time or another, but we say ‘So what!’

If I am not mistaken, I tell myself, this was the selfsame lad who, two months ago, came into our Center for the first time and boasted that “Iceland can’t lick *me*, no sir . . . !” Now I felt sorry for him as he wandered off, not at all convinced that I knew what I was talking about. I was sorry for him because I knew what he was going through, but he’d be all right after he got over the shock of having the wind taken out of his sails. I knew, because I had observed the fluctuations in the morale of our men who had been among the first Americans to arrive in Iceland. We had watched them go through all steps of adjustment; and there was only one phase, if prolonged, that gave us any real concern—that of the fellow who gloomed in silence.

One such, that I recall, sat and said nothing. Although his face and eyes were expressionless, there was about him an air of melancholic resignation; he could not be engaged in conversation; it was purely a monologue on the part of the one who tried. He was not surly or indifferent or angry—his mood was

nothing tangible that you could seize upon and perhaps help him to snap out of. He answered questions briefly. "Have you had good letters from home lately?" "Yes." "And is everybody well?" "Yes." "Would you like a cup of coffee?" "No, thank you." "Or a good book to read?" "No." "How about joining in the singsong?" "No." "So you don't like singing?" "Sure, but I don't feel like it now." Well, he was not the kind whom you could grab by the shoulders and push into a singsong, and he was not the kind who wanted to be teased into it. Nor was he "borderline," or else long ago he would have been in the hospital for treatment. . . .

So there was our problem. Sometimes we had seen men snap out of it—sometimes not. We had seen them go down, recover, and then go down again. With some few it meant in and out of the hospital, with briefer intervals between hospitalization, until finally they were sent home for advanced treatment and a probable medical discharge from the Army. Yet I saw no reason to believe that such instances of maladjustment could be blamed entirely upon the environment. According to one homefront rumor in those days, "Many, many lost their sanity in Iceland—boatloads of them had to be sent home." There were a few scattered cases, yes. Perhaps four or five men were sent home from time to time; certain congenital weaknesses, which it might take years to recognize under ordinary conditions, soon are diag-

PROGRESS

nosed in organizations under rigorous routine. As for "many" and "boatloads," however, that was as absurd as the rumor that many soldiers contracted T.B. in Iceland.

To prevent complete disintegration of the mind and spirit would require an experienced psychologist, of course; but every victim of incipient melancholia challenged us to delay a crackup. In many cases where "blues" were consistent but not serious, we discovered that our effort bore fruit. For the boy who is sensitive, highly strung and artistically inclined, routine Army life can be, at the outset, a living hell. Unless he is a genius or professionally trained, his is a struggle for self-expression. He needs material, guidance and instruction; but most of all he is in desperate need of encouragement for his artistic efforts. What we found was that we had nothing but encouragement to give.

We had been deluged with poetry, paintings, songs and innumerable objects of handicraft. Soon we observed that those who had hobbies, and who had received the proper encouragement, were happier than those who muddled along, not knowing what to do with themselves. All the latter needed was a little boost to get them started on something to occupy their minds. How to do it? They outnumbered us: individual attention was out of the question. Betty Clark, experienced in occupational therapy, and Doris Thain, can be credited as the first in our

group to work out a solution for this mass encouragement. Betty had drawn up a list of materials required for the handicrafts; but it would be months before the list was approved and materials were purchased, months before anything on a large scale in an arts-and-crafts program could be put into effect. Until that time, there was plenty of work to be done; to pave the way for that project, the idea had to be sold both to men and officers.

Betty plugged away at it, and in due time the idea caught on; the men definitely liked to work with their hands. Not a day passed but what all of us were approached by men who had drawn or painted pictures, fashioned little gadgets out of tin cans and coins, or turned out some pretty whittlin' (with packing-box boards for material). Their poems, short stories and articles were brought in for us to read and admire, and soon there was so much of this material available that the idea of a Poetry Contest was born. Doris volunteered to take charge of it, and it was so successful that soon it was followed by a Christmas Card Contest, with an Arts and Crafts Contest to follow. The response to this last was overwhelming; the exhibits all but crowded Doris out of her small Information Center, the only place where they could be displayed.

When the General saw this arts-and-crafts display he was completely sold on the idea of contests. The next Arts and Crafts Contest had the complete

PROGRESS

co-operation of the Army. A hall had to be hired for the exhibition of over five hundred entries, consisting of such articles as furniture made from packing boxes, ornaments made from shells and tin cans; a miniature hut complete in every detail, with a tiny door that opened, allowing one to peer in and see, by the light of a small flash-light bulb in the ceiling, a model stove, cots and fire buckets; paintings of Icelandic scenes, portraits, and beautifully fashioned airplane and ship models.

By now every soldier with an artistic streak was encouraged to use his spare time to good advantage. He was no longer a square peg in a round hole. He had the fun of working for a prize, and, even though he might not win it, there was always another contest with the possibility in view. Now there were no longer so many cases of the blues.

NO LONGER was the use of the British Officers' Club a remote possibility; already it was known as the new American Red Cross Center. The Engineers were working on it night and day, and we learned that it would definitely be ready by the fifteenth of September. Although we were to have moved out of the school by September first, the Icelanders extended the date to the fifteenth. We were all set to go.

The way things were shaping up, though, it looked as if we had bitten off more than we could chew. Mary was now working hard to get the new Center

in order, leaving me to carry on at the schoolhouse. Cam helped me in the evenings. Betty Clark was assigned to the task of arranging the house for the new workers. (Where, oh, where were they?) Ethel Rea had been sent to open the new center at Akureyri; camps were howling for programs, but Doris could cover only one camp an evening; the Navy wanted us to sponsor recreation for sailors; and on top of all this, three new centers were to be opened following those at Reykjavik and Akureyri. But still our prime worry was: would we get help in time for all these projects? Things were happening fast; the dreams over which we had worked, planned and struggled for so many months all seemed about to materialize simultaneously. How strange, we thought, to work hard for something you can't do without—only to find you can't handle it when you finally get it!

Other worries cropped up; Mary felt sure that our heating plant in the new building would not be ready; that we would run out of paint, linoleum, equipment and a hundred other details that were to make this a model recreation unit. Our orderlies worried right along with us. Wayne worked late into the night on the stage—a *real* stage. Curtains, footlights, props had to be ready for the opening. Bob was put in charge of maintenance; he fumed over plumbing, lights, heating and the lack of proper tools. Something else for us to worry about: our

PROGRESS

brand-new Center was going to look mighty funny without game equipment, chairs, radios, pianos—for these too had not arrived as yet.

My special worry was that I wanted a good crowd at the opening. Announcements were sent to all camps. Cam, our sign painter, went to work and notices were posted, virtually plastered, over all six rooms at the schoolhouse. Handbills were made up by the hundreds and given out to the soldiers. By word of mouth we spread the news: "Don't forget, your new Center opens September sixteenth." Then came a real headache—it was up to me, I was told, to see that there was a good turnout of girls at the dance that was to wind up the opening day. Well, that was a sticker—we could not exactly advertise for girls in the local paper. In fact, no mention was to be made that natives were invited to attend the opening. That put a crimp in my plans. At the last moment even a simple announcement that had been submitted to the local paper was withdrawn.

I had recourse to several "Don Juans"; they could tell all the girls they knew to tell their girl friends to come. Therein lay my greatest hope. Many soldiers, pleased to prove their wide acquaintanceship with the Icelandic girls, came to me from time to time: "I have three girls who are coming," or, "I can bring six." I had the shock of my life, though, when a soldier approached me with, "I'll bring two truckloads of girls if you will supply the transportation." I had

never seen this soldier before. Thinking that he was joking, I said that we could not use Army transportation for that purpose, and promptly forgot the subject. The following night he appeared at the Center and drew me aside in a very confident manner. "Now, look, you want this dance to be a success, don't you?" I nodded. "And it is your problem to get the girls. Now, without the girls how is the dance going to be a success, huh?" This made sense, but I protested that we would have *some* girls because the men were inviting them personally. "Ah, I don't mean I'll bring a handful, I mean fifty—sixty—or possibly eighty girls!"

This was too much for me. I looked at him sharply. He saw my look and said hastily, "This is no racket, don't get me wrong. These are going to be nice girls and you will have to see to it that they are treated right—plenty of M.P.s to make sure there is no monkey business." Where was he getting the girls? Who was he? Should I bite or pass the buck, I asked myself. "Now this is what I can do if you want me to," he said earnestly. "I may be able to get the transportation myself—I'll know for certain by tomorrow. I'll drop by and let you know." He was gone more quickly than I could ask him the questions I wanted answered before "we" plunged into this mass project too deeply.

Sure enough, the next night he came in, and with a pleased but serious look on his face, for by now we



COOL AUDIENCE

"At first I was a little scared of these 'unbelievers'—particularly if they were in the majority."

were partners, without any introductory explanation he announced in a hoarse whisper: "We are all set, I've got two trucks and they'll be able to bring as many as forty-five girls in each one." He rubbed his hands and licked his lips. "Yes, sir, we're all set for the big dance." Finally I found my tongue: "Look, I don't quite understand why you are going to go to all this expense and trouble—it is swell of you and we certainly appreciate it—but I want to explain that we cannot assume any responsibility for these girls except while they are actually in the Center. If they are the girls we want to have as our guests, and you say they are, you are Santa Claus and Superman all rolled up into one." He beamed. "You bet! Well, see you at the big dance." He started to leave, then hesitated. "By the way, if you need Nylon stockings, let me know." I thanked him and said I had plenty (wish I did now!), and he replied: "If you want to make them last, soak 'em in luke-warm water for a half-hour after each wearing. Well, good-bye." My, my, we live and learn, I said to myself. . . .

"They are here," said Betty, interrupting my thoughts. "Huh? Who is here?" "The new workers—they have arrived." "I'll believe it when I see them. Maybe you are right. . . ." Just then Doris came running into the hut. "The girls are here, I saw them at the Borg." Oh, no—this could not really be help at last! It was true, though, and by late afternoon we had all met the reinforcements, but more or less on

the wing—while we were working. We had originally planned to give these eight women a dinner or a party, but since no one could be spared to arrange it, our reception for them left much to be desired; and we added injury to insult by putting them to work right away.

Also, equipment and furniture for the Center had arrived. By September fifteenth everything—well, *almost* everything—was ready for the “big day.” We “old girls” (now that we had new members), were jittery and excited. “Oh, dear God, please make everything run right tomorrow.” Mary had planned a program that started at 3:00 P.M. and ran without interruption until midnight. In that time anything could happen—talent might not show up—there might be an air-raid alerte.

For the sake of the men who came from distant camps (and there were always many of these), we planned to keep the schoolhouse open as long as we could. Late in the afternoon an occasional truck driver dropped in. “Miss Mary said for you to give me a couple of chairs,” or, “I’m to pick up something.” Thus, one by one, chairs and desks and rugs were moved over to the new location. By eight o’clock that evening all that remained was the ten-gallon coffee kettle, a piano and the pool tables. “Business as usual! Coffee now being served!” The call echoed through the six rooms, and the boys lined up for the last serving in the old Center. As each soldier stepped

PROGRESS

up for his coffee and doughnut, we asked: "Are you coming to the big opening tomorrow?" Most of them said yes, they thought they might be able to come. We felt a bit relieved, for I was still worried about my responsibility—to drum up a good crowd. We warned, "Well, don't forget the dance—and please bring your girls." Some grinned, "Ain't got a gal. Will you have the first dance with me?" Cam and I promised dances right and left. We hardly cared whether it meant dancing for the entire night—it was to be our first dance for the boys. As the last drop of coffee was being served, the pool tables were moved out. Cam and I scurried about to round up the cups and pack the remaining odds and ends.

Only when the key locked the door did I feel a twinge of sadness such as you feel at having finished an absorbing book—a book that you did not know anything about when first you took it up. Tomorrow would be the start of another volume . . . new characters, plots and problems.

9

WHITE CHRISTMAS

SQUEEZED in between a pool table and the coffee kettle we rode to our new "home." Elation took the place of sadness when I saw our new Center with lights blazing from every window. The place was seething with activity. Mary greeted us breathlessly with a mop in one hand and a duster in the other. "Oh, girls—we'll have to work all night to have this place ready in time," she wailed, but not in despair, for Mary was really in her element. "Cam, you come with me. . . . Bob, have they got the phone working yet . . . ? I've got a job . . . Jim, please mop up that linoleum in the pool room . . . for you to do. Jane . . . oh, say, Wayne . . . can't you get that juke box in order . . . key . . . what key? Cam, Jane, have you got the key . . . ? Oh, *dear* . . . who has the key to the office?" She dashed off and we followed in hot pursuit. "Larry, have you the key to the office . . . ? The front, no, I mean the *hall* office. . . . Mr. Hagan is in the pool room . . . well, he was a moment ago . . . now, *where* did

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Wayne go? Who is wanted on the phone . . . ?
Oh, all right, *just a moment!*"

We trailed her to the phone, and when she was through she turned to us. "Girls, we'll never be ready by . . . no, Tom, not there, that goes in the library. . . . Jock, please find Wayne, like a good boy. . . . I can't find the office key . . . it is . . . ? Who opened it . . . ? It was open all the time . . . ? Well, land alive, why didn't someone *tell* me?" She sighed wearily and happily. "You girls had better check on the refreshment bar. Workmen have been tramping in and out of there all day, it is in an awful mess." It was indeed, and not until one o'clock did the floor, sink and shelves look like a model kitchen. The bar (originally it was) retained its name, although we couldn't serve anything stronger than soft drinks and coffee. It opened on to the ball-room by means of shutters, which later proved to be a convenient means of keeping out the swarm of would-be K.P. volunteers.

At 1:30 in the morning of September 16 we got back to our quarters and tumbled into bed, too tired to talk or think, and almost too tired to sleep.

The "big day" began auspiciously enough, with sunshine and clear weather. In keeping with the plans, the band and talent arrived by three o'clock and the day had begun officially. Under the professional guidance of our Master of Ceremonies Rosenthal, the program ran smoothly and flawlessly until

six o'clock. To my immense relief we had had throughout the afternoon a splendid turnout of soldiers, sailors and merchant seamen. If, we thought, the rest of the day worked out half as well, we could not find reason to complain. The evening program was to start with the presentation of the Center, and an address by the General, followed by the current troop show. The big dance was to wind up the day's events.

Shortly after we had returned from an early supper, we observed that the Center was rapidly filling up to capacity. All eight hundred seats in the ballroom were taken, and men were now beginning to line up against the walls. The ballroom, music rooms, pool room and halls were overflowing with men. Men poured in through the front door, and, though it soon became evident that there was no more room, they continued to squeeze in somehow.

There were two outstanding events in the presentation that will always be remembered by all members of the Icelandic Staff of the American Red Cross. The entire Staff lined up before the audience while Mr. Russell and Mr. McDonald made the presentation speeches that marked this Center as the latest gift of the American Red Cross to the Armed Forces in Iceland. Mr. Russell then brought Mary to the mike and introduced her to the men as "The hostess in charge of the new Center." She needed no introduction, for she received a tremendous ovation and

WHITE CHRISTMAS

cries of "Ray for Miss Mary!" and "Good for you, Mom." Mary had hardly expected to be called upon to make a speech. When the uproar subsided, she said as much, and added: "Boys, this is your place. I guess you all know that by now. When the winds begin to howl and the snow falls and the days are gloomy and dark, I want you all to come here and play with us." Delighted, the men clapped, whistled and howled. When the General addressed the audience, he concluded his speech with "Thank God, the Red Cross is here." He said this with such deep sincerity that it was like a citation. So heartfelt a statement wiped out all memories of the headaches and disappointments we had endured while making this dream of a Center come true. It was worth it, we felt, if one could get this kind of a pat on the back.

After the address our group filed out of the ballroom, and by now the hallway was so jammed with men that we all but tore the buttons off our jackets trying to worm through. A mass of bodies surged toward the ballroom doors. "We want to get in and see the show," they cried. I pushed my way back into the ballroom—there was still standing room if they didn't mind standing three deep against the walls. They streamed in until there was absolutely no longer any room. Again the doors had to be shut against the impatient crowd in the hallway. Some could be heard growling angrily, "Hell, we came to see the show—not to get pushed around by a crowd."

THEY SENT ME TO ICELAND

The crowd liked this. They taunted, "Oh, you didn't, did you!" "Well, why didn't you reserve a seat beforehand?" They jostled the complainers about good naturedly. "My, my, ain't it funny you wanted to see the show—we thought you just wanted to get pushed around!"

They stood thus until the show was over. They had missed the show but now they were counting on the dance. It was impossible for the outgoing crowd to leave the ballroom by way of the hall. The fire doors were opened and the audience of over one thousand men poured out on to the sidewalk. Traffic in the hall started moving as the men entered the ballroom. You could now take one step forward every minute—that is, if you moved with the crowd. Traffic was definitely one way, and it stayed so for the rest of the night. To return to any other section of the Center meant going out the fire door and way around to the front entrance. This I was forced to do, and I was startled at the size of the crowd, which now surrounded the Center entirely, waiting to get in.

Truck load upon truck load of men had come in from all the camps within a radius of thirty or forty miles. I bumped into Frank Hagan, whose unpleasant job it had been to notify these men that they could not possibly get in—he had to turn away truck loads of them. Frank, however, still retained his sense of humor in spite of everything. "Oh, boy, you take your publicity seriously," he grinned. I could hardly

WHITE CHRISTMAS

see anything funny in it; to advertise and then not come through with the goods was, to me, a terrible thing. How could we possibly have known that our Center, our brand-new *big* Center, was going to be inadequate? With the hall crowded beyond capacity, the program was being crippled. I felt sick and discouraged; and then I remembered that Mary probably felt the same way—she might need some help. It was impossible to find her, simply because it was impossible to break through the crowds. I returned to the ballroom, which by now had been cleared of the chairs and was packed with men eager to dance. How dancing was to be accomplished no one knew.

There was a concerted effort to clear the floor of stags. Everybody ran about telling everyone to back up; but back up where? Out of this chaos we managed somehow to clear a space—the music started and the space was filled with couples. Thank the Lord, I breathed to myself, we do have *some* girls here. Someone tapped at my elbow. “Don’t you forget you promised me the first dance, Jane.” How we could call it dancing I do not know, but at least it was short-lived. Someone tapped me on the shoulder: “You forgot, you promised *me* the first dance.” Oh, why had I been so stupid? I must have promised a good many men the first dance. Could I have been so addled?

In the midst of all this struggling I recalled that there were certain duties for which I was responsible.

Promises or no promises, I had to serve the refreshments. Within the shuttered sanctum of our tiny refreshment bar I found Mary and Cam catching their breaths in the more relaxing pastime of setting up cookies and bottles of coke in preparation for the serving. Jock Ogilvie, our Scottish volunteer, brought us case after case of cokes until the tiny room could hold no more. Although backs ached from the previous night's floor-scrubbing, feet were tired and swollen from the "dancing," and hands were still sore from opening hundreds of coke bottles that afternoon, we worked feverishly in blissful silence.

When we opened the shutters at the beginning of the intermission, we were horrified to see the throng before us. They rolled toward the refreshment bar like a tremendous wave. Those nearest the bar could not step away. "Only one bottle to a customer," we cried. "But be sure the girls are served." We appealed to them to stop pushing, but our voices could not be heard above the din of the talking and laughter. Now and then a woman's squeal of protest could be heard. That was bad—the crush was getting to be too much for the girls—and what if someone fainted? "Well, they'd faint upright, that's all. They won't be able to fall to the floor and get crushed in this mob," comforted Jock. A resounding blast, and the leader of the band stepped up to the mike. "Men, may I *please* have your attention? Someone is going to be hurt pretty soon if you don't quit pushing up to

WHITE CHRISTMAS

the bar. Now—we don't want any of these pretty ladies here to get hurt—so you who are gentlemen—let them sit down. And you lucky guys who have girls serve them." Ah, bless his heart for such a timely diplomatic speech. It did help a little, but we were forced to serve the cokes bucket-brigade fashion. As fast as we removed the caps, eager hands snatched the bottles and passed them back, back, back over the sea of heads.

When the shutters went down again we looked at one another in eloquent silence. "So *this* is what we are going to have every time we give a dancel" I didn't want to think about it right then, and I don't believe Mary or Cam wanted to, either.

How we managed the rest of the evening without a catastrophe, I don't know. No one got hurt; there were no fights, and the Center still was standing by the time the last man left at twelve-thirty. Back in our hut at the hospital we were again too tired to talk. We rubbed our sore feet—but gently—because the bottle openers had raised great blisters on our right hands. In bed at last—but sleep did not come. Rolling and tossing about, I tried to shake off a picture of crowds . . . surging masses. Had the men enjoyed the evening? What a disappointment it must have been for those who could not get in—what a disappointment to discover that the place was too small to enjoy all the fun we had promised them. To think that we had boasted of its size! I squirmed to

think of it. How many hundreds upon hundreds of men had I invited personally? Many had come, but I could not remember any one particular soldier that I knew. Faces . . . a sea of faces was all I could remember.

"HI THERE, Jane! Why didn't you have that dance with me last night? You broke your promise!" I looked up with misgivings but I could see that he was smiling. "Man! what a time we all had—got my hands stuck up over my haid and couldn't get 'em down again the rest of the evening—never seen sich a mob in all my life!" Ah, I breathed, he understood the situation and joked about it. *Now*, if only the rest felt the same way. . . . They did. One by one, as they came in, they would crack a joke or two. "Where was you last night, young lady? Out running around with the Brass Hats, huh?" "Oh, you know very well where I was—how do you think I got these blisters on my hands?" He winked at a bud-die. "Lookee here—you didn't git 'em opening coke bottles like you say. I was standing by the bar all evening drinking one coke after the other" (another wink), "almost a case, I'd say, *but* I didn't see you." They laughed. I felt much better about everything. Even my friend who knew all about Nylon stockings arrived, cloaked in his customary air of mystery. "Ah, hah—I told you I'd bring 'em, and I did. Sixty-five girls! Did you see 'em? Well, what did I tell you?"

WHITE CHRISTMAS

They were nice girls and there was no monkey business. Got 'em all back into the trucks and on their way home the minute the dance was over."

The comforting knowledge that the men had enjoyed themselves despite everything was like a healing ointment to us, yet the proverbial fly all too soon got into it. A sad state of affairs presented itself the next day; the detail of men assigned to us had not shown up. Bob and Wayne had done everything they could to straighten things out, but it was really a job for ten men and not two. For a week we were alternately with and without a detail. For many weeks to come we were not able to depend upon anything definite in the way of regular help except what those two men could do. Therefore, their willingness to do double duty, as it were, endeared them to us.

The weeks that followed were fraught with little moments of wordless exasperation for Mary and myself. With the exception of two, all the new recreation workers had been sent out to the new Centers. It would have been highly desirable to have more than four workers serving as hostesses in the big Reykjavik Center, for there were duties enough for a dozen; yet Mary thought things could be worked out. However, the Navy pleaded, and finally won a worker, which left us three to run the entire Center. Then illness put the other in the hospital for a few weeks, leaving only the two of us.

Then there were the "little things" that crept in and out of the day. . . . "Where are the keys to the equipment office?" A soldier is waiting to have the number eleven pool ball replaced, another man waits for a ping-pong ball, there is one set of keys, and the wrong person—the absent person—always has them. "Envelopes, please, ma'am—there is no more on the desk." We have run out of envelopes long ago, so there is a pause while we stop to make enough by hand to last throughout the day. "Miss Mary, we have run out of coat checks." Well, these will have to be made in time for tonight's dance. Volunteers will help—but we must have it on our minds to see that the chore is done before seven-thirty.

That such a matter as checking coats should provide us with a somewhat major problem would seem unbelievable. Yet it was one of "those things" that haunted us every time we had a large attendance—which was every evening. To check hundreds of coats in a room that had facilities for only two hundred was an art and a good stiff pain in the neck for anyone who had to handle the job. Several men were assigned to the task—in shifts of one at a time. But it took more than one man to handle the coats during the evening. Sometimes Mary or I had to step in and help until a volunteer presented himself for the job. Handling an Army overcoat—particularly if it has been caught in a shower—is no light matter. One night the main brace holding all the hooks on one

WHITE CHRISTMAS

side gave way under the heavy burden. It was a job to sort the coats and make sure that every man got the right one.

All these little snarls we could accept philosophically enough. But what really got us down was our heating unit. After all the individual stoves had been removed, the elegant radiators that replaced them were wont to grow cold at the most inopportune times. They always seemed to fail on the coldest and dampest of days. Upon investigation it was revealed that the pump was faulty, not the radiators. Repairs were made, which meant a day of no heat for us in any part of the Center. And although the unit limped along, we could never be quite sure of it. Always it was the same thing, the pump. Each time it was put back into commission, the repairmen (who by now had got to know this little offender) turned to us with a sigh. "This time I reckon she'll go . . . and keep on going!" Two days later a slow ominous chill would settle over the Center; the pump had decided to sulk. "Well, she's quit again and burned out another coil," Bob would announce sadly. . . .

The ballroom has acquired a dampness and all the men are driven out with the exception of the ping-pong players. The pool room is getting a bit too cool for the soldiers—one by one they are putting on their coats. The hall is by far the coldest spot, for a blast of ice-laden air sweeps in each time a frigid

soldier makes his exit. We who are on duty at the reception desk huddle close to the tiny electric stove. We can warm ourselves in small areas; first the feet—then the hands—and back to the feet again. “Do you think we’ll have heat by the time our evening program begins?” we ask anxiously. “Can’t tell . . . they’re rushing the job, but they need a new part that can’t be found. . . . Probably they’ll have to make it.”

The library and sitting room are the warmest in the entire Center, for there is a fireplace (coal-burning) in one that sends a little heat into the other. “Boys, we’ll have to have the concert in here today,” Mary announces. The two rooms fill up in no time and the concert begins. I desert my post at the desk for two good reasons; I want to warm up a bit, and also I want to hear these men play—they are the Engineers String Ensemble, the hottest in esoteric swing and the sweetest in classical. In the midst of the concert, the increasing chill, and my desertion, the General appears on one of his brief visits. . . . A day later, a new, large and efficient-looking pump was installed.

After three or four days we had discovered that our ballroom floor no longer had a polished surface. Short of help though we were, it had to be waxed and only two men were available to do the job. When it was discovered, further, that large gobs of gum dotted the entire floor, we realized that two men



GOING TO TOWN

"The most faithful and reliable means of transportation over the primitive Icelandic roads."

WHITE CHRISTMAS

were not going to be enough to get the chore done in time. Every wad of the sticky stuff had to be removed thoroughly before the wax could be applied. Armed with knives, Mary and I went to work on it. As our hands flew over the floor I began to understand why gum was not made available on troop ships. I also developed great sympathy for theater managers, bus-company and ballroom proprietors. I said as much to a volunteer who was helping me. "Well, we try to tell the girls to throw their gum in the butt cans, but either they couldn't get to them or they don't understand—because they just leave it fall out of their mouths wherever they happen to be."

So that was it! I remembered three girls at the dance last night. Shrill, saucy and ill-mannered, they had swept out of the powder room, haughty as queens, pushed arrogantly through the stag line and all but knocked me off my feet. Without a look of apology they hurried on, flouting the men who stepped up to them with requests for dances. Cheap little baggages . . . they knew they had our men where they wanted them. They were no more than the riffraff one finds in any country. I could be patient with our men and like it, but to have to have patience with these uppish little trollops was the toughest job of all.

If I did not slap them soundly or shake them till their teeth (if they had any) rattled, heaven knows

I wanted to—we all did at one time or another. Instead, I carried my jangled nerves elsewhere and worked my rage off in a more constructive pastime. . . . This I remembered as I jabbed at the gum in reflected anger. These girls, I thought, were making it hard for our men in more ways than one. They were social outcasts, and as long as they infested our dances no nice girls would come to them. We were now beginning to notice that more and more nice girls were coming to the dances, but as yet no method had been worked out whereby a welcome could be restricted to the nice girls only. It would all take time, I thought, but it could be accomplished.

FROM now on, we were to plan bigger programs and better parties. Hallowe'en was approaching. Everybody wanted to have a big Hallowe'en party with all the trimmings. By hook and by crook we managed to scrape up enough props and decorations, and once again Mary launched one of her big festive fun-making programs. Many of the workers were to be available; each was given a share of the program, for which she was responsible. Mary was to conduct the magician show, audience participation, plan and keep an eye on all the events; Doris had charge of the apple-bobbing; new members told fortunes and ghost stories. In the other section of the Center, Cam and I had charge of the "Hall of Horrors."

Needless to say, we had plenty of eager assistants

WHITE CHRISTMAS

in laying our gruesome plans. We used the rear hall that led from the ballroom through our unfinished kitchen, the living-dining room (also unfinished), and out again to the poolrooms. It was an ideal setup, with all sorts of blood-curdling possibilities. We didn't miss a one. We advertised to the effect that only the strong-hearted should venture through—and we meant it. We had everything: wet mops suspended from the ceiling—groans—crashes—the hot wire—the murder chamber and the hot seat. Cam had wheedled her boss, Bruce Falkey, into playing the part of "Dr. Darekill, the Mad Surgeon," and a very obliging soldier played the "corpse." If we overheard a soldier brag, "Shucks this ain't going to be anything but kid stuff, I ain't afraid," we scampered ahead of him in the dark and whispered gleefully to our ghoulish aides, "Give him the works, fellows, he says he can take it!" He got it from all sides the minute he entered, and when he arrived at the hot wire he got that too. "Ho-lee Jumpin' . . . ! I've been electrocuted!" In the sulky blue-green light of the murder chamber (our innocent refreshment bar), Bruce went into his act so convincingly that the horror-struck girls fled into the protecting arms of their escorts—which, of course, pleased the escorts no end. If the soldier scoffed to the last, he was invited to sit down and watch. In doing so he promptly got the hot seat, which sent him flying out into the ballroom. Hundreds went through all evening long,

and many made repeated trips in an effort to catch us at our own game. Altogether, the evening had been a great success; I hardly cared that I was voiceless for three days afterward.

Then, shortly before Thanksgiving, we moved from the hospital to our new living quarters—a large hut which adjoined the Center. Needless to say, we were delighted to have made at last the move that we had been anticipating ever since we arrived on the island. It meant a lot of little luxuries hitherto denied us. No more commuting problems, for one thing. Moreover, we had central heating—a radiator in each room, a bathroom within pleasant walking distance, and, best of all, our own kitchen—which meant no more GI cooking.

No sooner had two dapper native gentlemen been installed in our kitchen than they took over pot, stove and sink in a manner that boded well for our appetites. The more proprietorial and officious the cook, the better the meal. It was made clear to all that until favorites had been chosen, the kitchen was to be a sanctum sanctorum. This, of course, was not said in so many words, for our chefs spoke very little English, but by their stern looks and indifferent manner one knew they were saying: "Get out and stay out!"

Poor, poor deluded souls, I thought. They would have fared better had they set up a kitchen in the middle of 42nd Street and Broadway! I really felt

sorry for them. Our kitchen was the liveliest and the only thoroughfare between several points of interest. The Post Exchange, our living-dining room, the ball-room, the refreshment bar, the furnace room, the hot water compartment—all led off and on to that kitchen. I'll say one thing for those cooks; when they realized that they could not possibly lay claim to any part of that kitchen or its contents as their own (as all good cooks usually do), there was no flying off the handle, no display of temperament. Once we became acquainted with them, we found them to be affable, friendly and most eager to prepare the meals to our liking. In every respect but one their cooking was delicious and beyond reproach. The exception: they polluted our coffee with chicory in large doses. They could not give up this practice, no matter what we said. To them no coffee was real coffee unless "stretched" with chicory.

We all wanted a real American Thanksgiving Dinner. Suggestions came from all sides. With everybody talking to them in rapid-fire American, the cooks were soon thrown into a state of confusion and such incomprehension that they promptly forgot all the English they knew. "Have mercy on them and let one person deal with them," somebody suggested. Cam was willing to take over in this respect. She had been in and out of the kitchen, helping with the refreshment hour; by now they knew her well and understood her. All three went into a two-day

huddle with pots, pans and an Icelandic-English dictionary. They emerged floury and exhausted but triumphant: we had a real Thanksgiving Dinner cooked in true American style.

And now we had to think about Christmas. Mr. McDonald, Mr. Russell and Miss Baldwin had already left. No more could leave until after Christmas—and if more workers did not arrive soon, no one would be leaving the island until long after New Year's. This was not the only reason why, as the boys said, we “sweat them out”; our plans to give the boys a big Christmas called for a staff of twice as many workers as we had on hand. The program was to cover the entire island. Pianos, radios, furniture and a complete stock of recreation equipment had begun to arrive toward the end of November. On the first of December the “third echelon” of workers finally arrived.

ON THE day before Christmas the Center hummed with last-minute preparations for the “big week,” as we had begun to call it, and already the celebrating had begun. Aside from the traditional Christmas spirit, we began to observe quite early in the day that many of the men were imbued with another spirit as well. At first I was inclined to accept a was-sailer or two as isolated cases. “Look what I got.” A greatcoat was flashed open long enough to reveal a bottle of Scotch resting tenderly in the inner pocket.

WHITE CHRISTMAS

"I'll bet you paid plenty for it, too!" "Nope, not me—and it's sealed, too. See." Before I had a chance to warn him that he'd better keep the prize under cover, several soldiers had come through the front door, and in very high spirits they sang "I'm wishing you a *white* Christ-mas. . . . Merry, merry Christ-mas, everybody!"

Before the day was over I heard the rumor that thirty cases of liquor (destined for the officers' clubs) had gone astray. Where they went to, no one knew. As far as we were concerned, though, it was a confirmed fact and not a rumor. Rules or no rules, what could you do with hundreds of men who were obviously glowing under the influence of the purloined nectar—and what was more, had it hidden in their coats? Not much! Hope for the best and expect the worst. Just hope and pray that they will behave themselves, and don't be surprised if they don't.

Throughout the entire week, right up to New Year's Eve, the men celebrated in this fashion—and not one stepped out of line. There was, however, one episode, the memory of which still gives me mingled feelings of amusement and embarrassment. To fill in an hour's gap on the Christmas night program, I had encouraged the men in our detail to put on a show. Not only that: with the best and most innocent of intentions, I went so far as to write the script. For its theme I had chosen "Woman in Uniform." Now that the Waves, Waacs and Spars had been

added to the list of similar organizations of longer standing, we could, I thought, create even another "woman in uniform"—the "Witches" (Womens' Independent Troop of Hut Cleaners).

"Boys," I cornered them, "this is a cinch. Now, all you have to do is this . . ." The curtain would part, showing a group of "uniformed women" enjoying their moments of leisure in their hut. One devotes herself to a diary, another is engrossed in a book, a third is washing energetically while a fourth (coquette) combs her hair. (Important reason for being in a show—to wear a costume and get out of GI clothes.) As I said, it was a cinch, for most of it was to be pantomime and those with book and diary could read the script and provide the dialogue, fraught with the current jokes and Army slang.

"No need to rehearse except to know your cues. When Belhumor, out in front of the curtain, says '—and now I give you the Witches,' the curtain parts. Wayne, you're sitting on the cot writing in the diary and you start the lines. Arnicar, when you hear Wayne say his last line, '—tried to snow me under, such *brass!* Such wolves!' that's your cue to simper, like Gracie Allen, 'I didn't know they *had* wolves in Iceland . . . I thought they just had foxes, because everybody talks about foxholes!' And don't forget that you've got to be beautiful but dumb! Belhumor will introduce Wayne and Bob, who will wear the

WHITE CHRISTMAS

wigs. Arnicar, you're coy and dumb—you can wear my house coat. Johnnie or Larry can wear the checked pants. . . .”

Mary had made little inquiries from time to time, but I assured her that everything was under control, that she was not to worry—and furthermore, the “show” was to be a surprise.

It was, and no doubt of that! Until a half-hour before we were scheduled to go on, we were all on duty. Two could not be released in time for their acts, so Cam and I had to fill in. We ran to the little dressing room and hurriedly made up for the parts, checked to see that all other members of the cast were present and took our places behind the curtain.

“I can't find my script . . . who took my script?” cried Wayne hoarsely as the curtain was about to go up. Fear clutched at my heart, as they say in meler-dramers. “I thought you said you did have your script when I asked you five minutes ago.” “I *did* but I can't find it now!” There was some hustling about as all joined in the search. In the midst of all this frenzy the curtain went up, revealing a rather irrelevant tableau to over eight hundred men. Before we were able to get our bemuddled curtain man to blot the scene, we had been greeted with a salvo of cheers, hoots, and shrill whistling from the audience. The uproar continued. When the curtain did not go up again, the audience waxed impatient. We still could not find the

missing script. "I think that I can remember the lines," said Wayne, and I hoped he could, for he started the show and supplied most of the cues.

With his scrawny wig hanging over one eye, his lips and cheeks intensely red, Wayne presented a rather startling sight to the audience. Somewhere along the waterfront everybody, at one time or another, must have seen just such a female character as he depicted. Looking like a shrewish barfly of an old hag, he minced, tittered coyly, and flirted with the audience. He had to, for he had forgotten his opening lines. When he finally recovered his memory enough to convey the gist of the script, his interpretation sent the audience into gales of laughter such as one would hear in a burlesque house. . . . Did I tell him to say *that*? Yes, now he was following the script, and he was remembering most of it, but it was all twisted about and everything he said seemed to have a double meaning. I could hardly believe my ears, and as I looked toward the wings I could see Mary's eyes popping.

This show, for an audience none too sober, was a spicy bit of corn and they made the most of it. They whistled, stamped their feet, heckled, guffawed, booed and participated in the performance. Things were getting pretty rough. I intercepted Wayne and sang a few numbers—and meanwhile the pantomime was being carried out behind my back. While I was singing—so I found out afterward—Arnica, playing

WHITE CHRISTMAS

the coy part, was mimicking a strip-tease and doing a very professional job of it, too. Wayne was also attracting considerable attention by sitting in a very unladylike position, which allowed the audience to view his scanty purple-sateen swimming trunks. I also learned that the members of our cast had warmed themselves up to the characters they were to play with large and frequent draughts of the same spirit that prevailed throughout the entire audience. No wonder, then, that "It was so bad it was good," as a close friend made haste to tell me!

FORTUNATELY for myself, we were all too busy the rest of the week to allow my monster of a brain-child to become the topic of horrified conversation among us. When January 2 came around, we all drew sighs of relief. We could look back and say that the past week had gone over well, with the exception of my little endeavor; but it had left us all reduced to the verge of exhaustion.

All of a sudden, our facilities had grown so large that our Center no longer had the personal touch, the intimate homelike atmosphere that our little school possessed. "Miss Mary, I don't get a chance to talk to you much these days. Every time I come here to see you, you're always so busy." No longer could the men group close around the piano while Mary played. "Hey, Mom, let's sing 'Johnny Dough-boy,'" or "Let's sing 'I Don't Want to Walk Without

You'!" That was how it used to be. Now she was perched up on the stage, and quite alone, while anywhere between three hundred and eight hundred men sang. Oh, they sang, sang well and loved it; but somehow it wasn't the same. . . . "Gee, Jane, the place is too big. I don't seem to be able to find my old friends in this mob you have here all the time." That was true. Now it was no longer easy to "get things done." If we wanted to have a group of musicians play for us, we had to channel carefully through our own organization—and by the time our original request reached the men who were to play, it was too late. We were beginning to move slowly and ponderously on matters big and little. Perhaps, we cracked, we were getting to be like the Army.

Now there were eight Red Cross Centers functioning in Iceland. Had we grown and expanded that much in the past four months? By now the program was running in a highly professional manner; everybody had her specialized job to do, and gone were the days when we each did a little of everything. Was the adventure somehow losing a bit of its tang, now that it had grown out of the pioneer stage?

10

HAPPY NEW YEAR

News from Washington: we are to be released! Those who wish to return will be staggered, two at a time. Cam and I are to go first. Keep it quiet. Tell no one.

Home? Going home? No time to believe, question. No time to reflect upon this news . . . things have to be done right away! We may leave in three weeks and yet we might leave within three days.

What to take, and what to leave? How could I possibly have accumulated so much! Sort it all into two piles . . . this to take, that to leave. And how am I ever going to pack *all that* into my trunk and foot locker? Oh, I can't leave that goofy little hand-carved figure . . . or that souvenir . . . soldiers gave me those . . . no, I'll take them and leave this instead. Gradually the two piles become switched. What was to be left is now to be taken, and vice versa. I am back where I started. Hurry! The censors are coming to seal all baggage. Hurry!

The last seal has been put on the baggage. "You're all set now." They shake hands with us. "Well, good luck to you!"

Hurry! Passports have to be cleared at the Legation.

Tell no one.

Hurry! We must go to Headquarters Camp and exchange our money for American currency. "American money looks good, doesn't it? Listen to the bills crackle. . . . Why, it almost smells good!" The coins jingle as they are scooped clumsily into my hand. . . . Some fall to the floor with a musical ring. Only American money can sound like that! The Finance soldier smiles. He knows the reason for such unsteady hands. An exchange like this means we are going home. He grins, and says "Good luck!"

Keep it quiet.

"I've heard the news. . . . Good luck." Somehow, the word has got about. "Is it true? Gee! Well . . . good luck." It's hard for us not to tell everybody that we are leaving. Yet—"I had to come and wish you all the luck." That sort of news gets around. "It won't be the same—but I'm glad for your sake." This may go on for weeks. Who knows? "Oh, I'll probably still be here when you come in again," I say. Some say nothing. They look at you and shake hands in silence. . . .

"Be on board the ship by eight o'clock tomorrow morning!"

Hurry, we are to say good-bye to the General. Again we shake hands and hear the words "Good luck."

HAPPY NEW YEAR

"Good luck" from everybody. Yet this is no banal expression of farewell. The two words have a new world of meaning. None can forget the boys who went down with the ship that was taking them back for Officers' Candidate School. How could we forget, when we knew those men so well? None can forget the furtively won victories scored up by enemy subs. No one can deny the risk . . . the chance . . . the gamble. . . . Good luck!

No time for fears over what *might* lie ahead in that bleak stretch of water. Hurry! It is seven-thirty—we are to leave in half an hour—no time for tears over what is fast becoming a memory. I don't like to say "good-bye." It's "I'll be seeing you!" instead.

We are all strangely quiet as we climb the steep gangplank. We seem numbed and smothered by myriad poignant emotions that have been storming us since we first heard that we were leaving.

Not until the faint dull vibration of the Diesel engines have made our ship a living, breathing creature do we seem to realize that we are actually on our way home. Even then there is no display of jubilation or excitement, no joyful celebration. That will be reserved till after we get home—if we get home!

The men want to sing. We know quite a few. Now they are returning for O.C.S. Card games have been going on in the lounge ever since we came aboard; they'll go on until all the money is in one pocket. We

sing so loud that they pause to frown at us good-naturedly. It is a good excuse for some of the losers to leave the game. They join the singing.

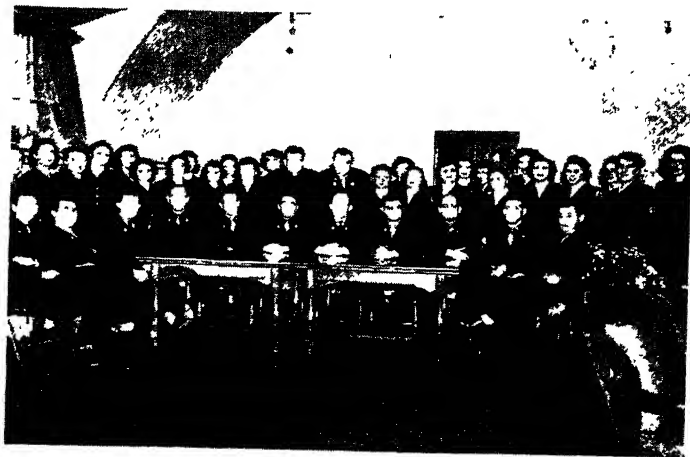
It has been a pleasant evening. More singing tomorrow night if it is not any rougher than it has been tonight.

ENVELOPED in darkness, I lie in my bunk and listen to the living sounds of the ship. All four corners of the little cabin creak and whisper soothingly with each gentle roll. "Home, home, home," they seem to say. The mist is clearing, thoughts and memories begin to detach themselves from the imbroglío of a million things that have been done and said since I was on a ship last. Experiences, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual . . . all crowded into the space of one brief, fleeting year. To remember, think or speak of all that has been said and done during that year would take a lifetime. . . . Even then, there will be countless things left unsaid far more eloquent and meaningful than all that which will perhaps be said, I thought.

This idea carried me back to our first night in Iceland; but now I am able to finish the conversation we had had with the American nurses, when they told me: "We've only been here four months . . . seems like years." That, and nothing more. Now, a year later, and on my way home, I can remember this clearly; and I know now what they might have gone



"THE FIRST ECHELON"
(May, 1942)



REINFORCED A.R.C. PERSONNEL
(December, 1942)

HAPPY NEW YEAR

on to say. I recall now that there was about them a gayety too flippant. The sharp forced laughter, the attitude of sophistication, were belied by something else—maybe an expression in their eyes—that seemed to say: "This is just an act to help me make the best of a bad situation."

What had been the "bad situation?" The memory of their experiences unfolds; they might have said: "Why, in the beginning it seemed lots of fun. There were thrills that came with the orders that meant Foreign Service, the thrill of being an important part of a large and wonderful Army; the farewell parties, final good-byes; the parties aboard the ship, the flattering attention from so many men. . . . Yes, that had all been very real, very exciting and lots of fun. But, well, after December 7, it began to be different, somehow. There are war fronts, and . . . well, in Iceland there is just the usual run of minor ailments . . . hardly justifying our professional training. We ought to be doing front-line nursing; that's why we volunteered for Foreign Service." (I know, I can recall the wonderfully professional care those ocean survivors we saw, and other casualties, received. How happy the nurses were who had those cases! How sharp the let-down after the men had been discharged.)

"Oh, of course there are always parties going on in the camps, at one time or another. That ought to be an outlet, a release from . . . well, 'monotony'

isn't exactly the word for it. There really is no way of putting it into words, but there is something from which you feel you have to escape. . . . Going to a party now isn't what it was. Everybody seems to want to run away. They try too intensely, too desperately to have a good time and forget. Everybody goes through the motions of having a good time, but . . . they're trying to kid themselves.

"No; it just isn't the same. At first it was novel and exciting, too, but now it is just as monotonous and fruitless and futile as that something we are trying to escape. Dating? Yes, of course it is very pleasant to be rushed, to know that you can have your pick of the men. But in time you understand that your looks, your personality . . . *you* . . . have nothing to do with your popularity. You can be cross-eyed, buck-toothed and have the personality of a wet dishrag, and you'd still be popular because first you are a woman, and second, you are an American woman! Fall in love? Why, yes, some will . . . who have no other commitments. That is all right if you are convinced that it is real; but there are too many doubts gnawing away at your idealism . . . don't kid yourself!"

What was the name of the corporal who said: "There are but two kinds of people in the world; half spend all their lives trying to kid the other half, who spend all their lives trying to kid themselves! Who are you, the kidder or the one who's kidded?" I re-

member that this question swept me off my feet. I had no answer for him, except a shrug of the shoulders, a smile, and "Quien sabe?" What *was* his name. . . . I fall asleep trying to remember.

"SHE'LL roll like a sunuvagun because she's round-bottomed . . . built for going into shallow harbors and coming right up close to the docks," said one of the men. It was going to be interesting to hear what rumors circulated regarding the seaworthiness of this ship. "Well, shucks, she wasn't built to go into rough waters. She just runs up and down the coast, and when the weather gets rough, she runs into a harbor until it blows over." Wasn't built for the rough Atlantic? She did look rather small and a little on the perishable side. She had a fair complement of boats and life rafts, though. That was better than the first ship we started out with: no life boats at all. Just "Jump and get to a raft." "I hear she got battered up on one of her trips to Russia." "Hasn't been dry-docked for a long time. Plates all loose. She's in bad shape." "We'll be lucky to make it in twenty days—but we have only water and fuel to last fifteen days—no more." And so the rumors run.

Now there are rumors about our progress, our position: "Say, we turned around last night and now we are heading back to Iceland!" The captain confirms it. He is a friendly Floridian, who likes people and likes their company. He does not hold with fuss and

feathers and solitary grandeur, as many captains do. Dressed in leather-visored cap (mail order), seaman's jacket, trousers and high boots, he visits among the passengers from time to time. "Say, Captain, are we past Greenland yet?" He shakes his head slowly. "Nope . . . soon . . . maybe tomorrow." He eyes us, and adds dryly: "But why are you so anxious to pass Greenland?" He knows why. Everybody on board has a feeling that once Greenland is between Iceland and us, we are indeed on our way. Everybody has been asking him this question for the past day or so. His answer is always noncommittal: "Tomorrow, maybe." Now there is this rumor that we have turned back to Iceland—and all he will say is "Yes."

He was stricken ill on the trip up; sickness has left him thin and pale. We are invited to inspect the bridge, and all the instruments of navigation are explained to us. In his cabin we are served cookies and learn that there isn't a harbor along the East Coast that he doesn't know thoroughly. Furthermore, he is a deep-sea navigator of many experiences. On one of his innumerable trips between America and Russia he lost his "gold braid" to Davy Jones—hence the seaman's togs. "Yup, that was trip before last. Sank in no time" (he snaps his fingers), "just like that. . . . Cargo lost, but not a man went down with her!" On his desk is a Bible handsomely bound. "An Army

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Chaplain gave that to me on the last trip up. See, I have several." He holds out a very worn old Bible. "This has been with me ever since I made my first trip." He fingers it lovingly. "It's always good reading," he says thoughtfully.

A day or so later the word runs: "We turned around, and now we are really on our way home!" The captain is not at hand to confirm this. "Yeah, the convoy from England was late, or something . . . not safe for us to fool around waiting for 'em." A plausible bit of scuttle-butt!

"Convoy sighted!" Everybody dashes out on deck. The horizon's clean line is broken by dark blobs with a smudge over each. They seem to be coming toward us from all sides. We lean on the rail to await the meeting of the two convoys. We all begin to talk a little excitedly. This is the first time since we left that we have all shared the same mood of anticipation. The convoy is not a rumor. It is a solid, material, substantial fact that can be seen and discussed.

"I've counted thirty . . . and they're still coming. It's going to be a big convoy!" Everybody is counting, and the last one counting has the biggest number. "Forty-three . . . forty-four." And now we have lost count. It's a big convoy, all right. "Wonder if they have any troop ships?" One or two ships loom larger than the rest. Can't make out.

The ships in our own convoy are indulging in a

very lively conversation. Until now they have been reserved and laconic, with the exception of one Russian freighter. She has blinked and flashed complainingly ever since we left Reykjavik. "Slow down," she is rumored to have signaled. "Get her up to eight knots," we have replied, according to the rumor. "Can't do over six knots." We have been traveling a good eight knots and belching great clouds of black smoke. The Russian has managed to straggle along in the rear, whipped up now and then by a destroyer. "They're all women aboard her—from the radio operator and captain right down to the stokers." It is hard to know whether or not to believe this. Still, it is quite possible. "Second mate had a baby a little while back, but she's on the job again." At this point, as far as I am concerned, the veracity of all rumors about this Russian ship and crew has reached the moment of inertia. Later, perhaps, I say to myself, I shall know more about it.

The little Icelandic freighter close to our stern joins the conversation, which apparently has something to do with changing our course, for now we seem to be traveling about in a wide circle, zigzagging all the while. "Why! they're all freighters and tankers! All sizes, too." "See that big ship over yonder? She's got some troops and the British admiral aboard; he's in command of the convoy." We are still trying to count the ships, but it is difficult because many are scattered beyond the heart of this convoy.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

We are surrounded by them, and have taken up our position in the center lane. Now all ships proceed in the same direction.

FOR a day or so the weather holds fair, with smooth seas. The soldiers, casual sailors and crew play bingo in the dining saloon. By now most of the money aboard is in five or ten pockets, and the losers welcome the bingo game as a mild form of gambling with smaller losses.

The little red light attached to my life jacket has intrigued me ever since we started. We didn't have them when we went up to Iceland. "Yes, and now they have them on all the ships. Good thing, too. You didn't stand as good a chance of being spotted in the dark before . . . had to slosh about in the water yelling your lungs out, until you were either heard or it got light enough for you to be seen." I haven't given my life jacket much thought except to treat it with considerable respect. I know it is quite possible that it might save my life. It goes everywhere I go except into bed and under the blankets. "There's a guy sleeping with his clothes all on . . . shoes, life jacket and all! He's taking no chances—but I can't see the shoes and jacket!"

No one is taking any chances, and there is an immediate response to all fire and boat drills. If I miss the life boat I have a raft spotted . . . in case. "Don't jump, whatever you do. You might hit a boat, or

floating debris, and break your head wide open." In a year's time a lot has been learned about the procedure of getting off a sinking ship. . . .

"I believe we're in for a little rough weather." Our dinner plates start skating about. I hastily right a water glass. Before the meal is over we know that it is going to be a struggle to walk to the companionway. Not an hour after we have eaten, the storm has risen to such a peak of fury that the ship no longer rolls smoothly. She lurches sharply. A medicine chest is wrenched from the wall, thrown against the opposite wall and crashes to the floor. "It's all right, nobody's hurt." As we start to return to our cabins, another terrific lurch serves to tighten our grip on the handrails along the walls of the narrow corridor. "It's not safe to stay in your cabins. Things are breaking loose!"

In the little lounge at the end of the corridor there is more excitement. The last roll sent a soldier skidding across the lounge, still in his chair. He broke through the delicate railing about the stairhead and plunged out of sight. The word is relayed to us, "He says he's all right . . . isn't hurt." But before he can extricate himself the ship gives another mighty heave sideways. Two more soldiers spin across the floor. They crash through the railing and are lost to view. There is an ominous silence for a moment or two, and then we hear: "They're hurt, badly!" Not only

are we rolling now but pitching up and down. The ship seems to be laboring up some steep incline. Up, up, up—and then a shudder runs through her as she starts her giddy downward course. When we hit bottom, she wallows uncertainly and then struggles up again. With each roll we seem to lie over to port longer.

Seamen, surefooted though they are, have to fight their way through the corridor. They drop little scraps of news as they pass us. "A hunnert-mile gale beating on our stabbard side." No wonder we are practically lying down on the wall! Each roll leaves her a little heavier on the port side. She tries to recover and to right herself, like a sick animal trying to get back on its feet. The attempts are heavy and lifeless. "My God, she's rolled way beyond her safety angle. . . . How much more can she take?" The voice is tense, and now I think it has every right to be. I am speechless. "Not even a fighting chance if she founders. . . . Couldn't even get clear of the ship, much less survive in this seal!" Caught like rats in a trap—yet everything is being done that can be done.

A loud banging can be heard. Seamen again struggle past. "Lifeboat Number One is breaking away from one of the davits . . . got to cut her adrift." Right on top of this comes the news that the ballast has shifted. Tons of lava dirt and cargo have loosened up and shifted to port. The merchant-marine crew

is still arguing for time-and-a-half overtime to do the job. All hands are needed immediately. Those of the soldiers who have not been injured respond.

Gradually seas and winds let up, and gradually the ship rights herself as the ballast is shoveled over to the starboard side. Finally we are able to return to our cabins. Mattresses, bedclothes, bags and clothing are strewn about in the water that has leaked in through the door that opens out to the port deck. There is still a heavy list, and those in the portside cabins have to be lashed two in a bed.

"We lost our convoy last night." "We intended to. . . . After all, the danger of ramming was greater than any other danger!" "I have never seen anything like it, in all my twenty years at sea. Waves a good hundred feet high and a gale that was blowing a hundred miles an hour!" What are we going to do now? Go on without the convoy? No one knows. Some say, "We're headed in for St. John's for a survey of our damages. She took a bad licking and they think some of the plates have sprung."

By night the sea is smooth and the moon is shining. We are a perfect target—a dark outline against the horizon. I cannot sleep for the thought of it. How near is the nearest sub? How soon before it will spot us? It seems almost certain that they will find us, alone and unescorted. They travel in packs and comb the waters. How could they miss us? I review the

HAPPY NEW YEAR

procedure in the event that we are torpedoed. Will it be a dull thud, or a sharp crash that will send my hands flying to the flashlight under my pillow? I must remember that it is there, and that the first thing I must do is reach for it. I must not lose my head and try to grope around in the dark; in all likelihood the torpedo will cripple the lighting system.

At two o'clock I get up and reassure myself that everything is in order: first the slacks, heavy sweater, heavy stockings, boots. Then my fleece-lined coat. Last the life jacket. Check to see that warm gloves are in the pocket of the coat . . . yes, they are. If there is time I shall take my small zipper bag with candy, cigarettes, a bottle of rum and crackers. Everything is in order and I tumble back to bed, but still I cannot sleep. I begin to chide myself; do I *feel* that something is going to happen? I plumb my intuition but it tells me nothing. I am just uneasy, that's all. Think about something else, count sheep, make up stories . . . anything to take my mind off this foolish rehearsal in case "something happens." I find myself wishing something would happen, now that I am ready for it! Why, I am almost disappointed as the hours go by and our ship continues to glide over the smooth water without interruption. . . . What a fool I am! Several hours ago I was afraid, and my fearful anticipation led me to make careful preparations. Having done so to my own satisfaction, the

sensible thing to do now would be to go to sleep in fatalistic resignation! Long after dawn, I finally fall asleep.

WE CAN eat again in the dining saloon, now that the wreckage has been cleared. Tables and benches had cut loose during the storm, and a port had opened, allowing the sea to tumble in and flood both the saloon and kitchen. Several of the stewards were badly injured.

There is a noticeably cold feeling between the crew and the soldiers aboard. For one thing, the crew managed to clean the soldiers out in the card and dice games; and during the storm the crew refused to shift the cargo on the grounds that they would not be paid time-and-a-half overtime for doing the job. Many in the crew protest that they had nothing to say in the matter. Their spokesman did all the talking. They could not oppose him.

Now the rumors all over again. "The Admiral's ship rammed into another and both went down . . . troops and all." "They say our Captain knew the storm was approaching, and late in the afternoon he signaled over to the Admiral for permission to break away from the convoy to lessen the chances of our ramming when the storm came on. The Admiral sent a message that we were all to stick together and ride the storm out in our regular positions in the convoy. Boy! When she hit, the skipper didn't take much

HAPPY NEW YEAR

time to clear the other ships!" I can remember now how the word ran through the ship while we were rolling and tossing: "We've cleared the last ship . . . last ship is behind us . . . we're safe from ramming!"

That day we have a long boat-and-fire drill and gun practice. The second night on our own is a repetition of the first. Moonlight, millpond sea, and . . . perfect target. Again I am fearful and apprehensive. And once again I do not fall asleep until long after dawn. They say I might just as well sleep at night, for it is equally dangerous during the day. But somehow I feel safer when I know that everybody is up and awake, and I can sleep better. This doesn't even make sense, but nevertheless I can sleep like a log. At night it is so silent. No voices . . . nothing but the soft breathing noises of the ship as she slides over the smooth waters. No; I must stand all the night watches along with the few who are awake and on the alert for trouble. . . .

"Land, land, land sighted!" Oh, thank God, we've made it at last. It is Newfoundland. We crowd upon the decks to drink in this glad sight. We are actually jubilant now. Says one soldier beside me, "I was never a religious man . . . perhaps an atheist . . . but believe you me, after that storm and no escort I believe in the Divine Providence!" There seems to be an air of incredulity among us. Some can hardly realize that they have gone through this experience,

now that land and safety are in sight; while others can hardly believe that land and safety have been reached after such a terrifying ordeal. There is wonderment, bewilderment, mixed with great joy. "Somebody's good prayers were with us."

As we near the mouth of the harbor, an official-looking boat comes out to challenge us and learn our identity. There is much hallooing through megaphones as the small boat draws alongside: "I sy, wot's the nime of this ship? Eh?" A soldier leans far over the rail and mimics the accent. "Oh, sy, ol' man, 'ow about a wee spot of tay?" A ladder is thrown over the side and the little boat backs, approaches, misses and backs again for another try at it. There is much cheering when the contact has finally been established.

A man climbs aboard and disappears with our Captain. Ten minutes later we are inching through the narrow bottleneck opening that leads into the cup-shaped harbor of St. John's, Newfoundland. We anchor in the center of the stream. We may go ashore, but we must report back by eleven o'clock tonight. Small harbor boats take us ashore for twenty-five cents.

ST. JOHN'S is very hospitable; were it not for the fact that we are going home, we would regret leaving. The crew and troops have managed to get around the Newfoundland liquor ration and for two nights our ship has reverberated with loud laughter and off-key

HAPPY NEW YEAR

singing. They are letting off steam, but on the third night they are not allowed ashore.

We are surveyed and found to be in fairly good condition, considering. An escort of two corvettes leads us out of the harbor and on our way to Halifax. More sleepless nights made a wee bit safer by the escorts and the innumerable drifting ice floes.

Halifax—a little over a year since we were in sleepy Halifax! What a change: now the streets are packed with men and women in uniform, and all restaurants are jammed up to two o'clock in the morning. It is bitter cold, the coldest weather we've had in a year. How strange everything looks. We want to phone, wire and write home that we are safe. A late order cancels our plans. "Say nothing. A troopship was lost between Halifax and Boston just because the troops were allowed to establish contact with their homes." "Don't forget, the men we knew went down right off Cape Cod just because some of the men told where they were and where they were going when they phoned their families from Halifax."

Back into open seas again. We are on our way, our last lap. "I hear we are going to Boston." The rumor is enlarged upon. "We are going to stop over at Portland, then Boston, but we won't be able to get off at Boston because we are going to disembark at New York." The rumor becomes a bit confused. "No, we are going to New York first, to unload the cargo we

picked up in Halifax, and *then* we are going back to Boston and disembark!" Bets are laid upon the port, upon the day; and on the last day, when we learn that we are to land at Boston, the bets narrow down to the hour of docking. And now there is no longer any doubt as to when, or where—dawn shows us the Massachusetts coastline. We shall dock around mid-day. Now the bets say that we shall not be able to clear quarantine and be off the ship until late in the afternoon.

We steam slowly into Boston Harbor. A "place called America" is no longer a myth. . . . As the familiar outline of the city approaches ever nearer, there is a sudden, poignant memory of those I have left behind on that wind-swept little pin-point of an island in the North Atlantic. All the soldiers that I knew there now are fused into the memory of one: the soldier who said to me, "What the hell am I doing here? I ought to be fighting!" Fighting? He is fighting! Fighting the toughest, meanest kind of battle . . . the war with a foe you can't beat off with guns and action. Steadfast, vigilant, prepared, this sentry of Iceland is steeled to the war of nerves.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



133 966

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

